

## PHD

### Counter-planning a future? French trade unions and employment, 1981-1986

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*Award date:*  
1988

*Awarding institution:*  
University of Bath

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COUNTER-PLANNING A FUTURE?  
FRENCH TRADE UNIONS AND EMPLOYMENT,  
1981-1986.

Submitted by ALAN RAYBOULD  
for the degree of PhD of the University of Bath  
1988

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful thanks is due to the supervisor of this piece of research, Dr. Michael Rose, not only for his guidance throughout but for the confidence he has shown in me and for acts of friendship going beyond the call of duty.

Thanks also to Claude Durand and his colleagues of the Groupe de Sociologie du Travail for the use of their facilities during my year in Paris and the hospitality shown towards me.

Special thanks to Annie Daumur and Jean Lecamus for the roof over my head, the cheese and the wine during that year in France.

I am grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council for the grant which enabled me to carry out the research, under the Anglo-French studentship scheme. My work was linked to other research projects at the University of Bath supported by the ESRC (HR5804/2 and HR 7504/1).

Finally, I am indebted to all the trade unionists, and particularly those working in the companies I visited, for the cooperation they gave me and the time they found to answer my questions, even as the problems built up around them...

## SUMMARY

The French trade union movement has traditionally been viewed as 'deviant' in that its majority Confederations have mobilised against capitalism long after unions in other developed countries have found accomodation within it.

From the mid-1970s, as unemployment began to mount, political mobilisation was seen as insufficient by many activists and there were calls for the unions to address immediate problems, which implied a greater understanding, if not acceptance, of economic structures and the management of industry. The arrival of a Left government in 1981 helped this development while further diluting the attractions of overt revolutionary mobilisation.

The thesis charts the evolution of this 'proposition force' unionism in France and investigates concrete cases of union initiatives in the post-1981 period.

The unions' actual achievements are slim, mainly because the labour movement remains riven by ideological and political differences: consequently, numerical weakness is endemic, united action on specific proposals is rare and the employers' reading of the economy is allowed to prevail.

However, some of the Confederations have pushed through a doctrinal renewal which has given them the potential to be more effective than in the past in the field of employment - seen as the key issue of the late twentieth century, in terms of both volume and quality,

in an international economy where labour flexibility is a major requirement.

Their effectiveness now hinges on political choices, including the alliances they forge between themselves, but the omens are not good.

After a period of reappraisal, the largest Confederation, the CGT, is seen retreating into a reactionary isolationism, influenced by a Communist Party which remains dominant within it despite its electoral decline.

The CFDT's new pragmatism has failed to attract workers or convince employers and it may have been overtaken as second largest Confederation by FO, which shuns the 'counter-plan' movement.

COUNTER-PLANNING A FUTURE?  
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## INTRODUCTION

The developed world has now been in the throes of a profound economic crisis for over a decade. The crisis is structural in that it results from changes in the international economic order and its destabilising effects on industry have been exacerbated by rapid technological advance. Millions of jobs have been lost in manufacturing industry<sup>'1'</sup>.

Western trade unions have therefore seen their membership bases eroded and have been searching for ways not only to arrest the decline in jobs but also to organise in those sectors which previously they have neglected or which have proved resistant.

They have attempted - with varying degrees of determination - to shake off the old image of domination by male, middle-aged, skilled or semi-skilled workers and sought to attract more women and young members into their ranks. This, in turn, has obliged them to face up to social and cultural changes over and above the changes in the labour market<sup>'2'</sup>.

Reflecting this crisis of identity, unions in all western countries have had to question their approach to fundamental aspects of trade union activity.

Governments throughout the developed world have, sooner or later, adopted similar policies to overcome the crisis and these have run counter to union priorities of jobs and maintained purchasing power. The

onus has been put on 'squeezing out' inflation, wage controls (under various guises) and a refusal to subsidise loss-making firms.

Companies have been obliged to adapt to shrinking or low-growth markets and intense international competition. In order to improve unit costs, jobs have been shed and wages held down. New technologies have - for the time being at least - increased the pressure on jobs and provided a further incentive for companies to reduce wage bills to free the vast sums needed for investment.

Unions are left in something of a quandary. They may be successful at holding up wages in those areas where they are strongest but, in a period of low growth and assuming tight monetary control, this is theoretically - and often in practice - at the expense of less well-organised sectors. In effect, such union 'successes' may underpin the emergence of a dual labour market comprising a well-organised, secure 'core' sector and a 'peripheral' body of 'insecure' workers in 'precarious' jobs.

Furthermore, the 'bastions' of unionism are precisely those firms in traditional industries most under pressure due to foreign competition, saturated markets, lack of investment in the past, alternative products and so on. Hence the problems of the steel industry, motor cars, textiles and coalmining, to name the most prominent. More than ever in the past, governments in the developed world have been refusing

political and social pressures to save jobs in these areas in the face of 'economic realities'.

Unions have long seen the need to influence economic policy at the highest level - be it by formal links with parties (as in the UK), by mobilising to put pressure on the legislature (in France, especially) by lobbying (the US), or by other methods. This has become all the more urgent given the depth of the current recession and government's role in it through monetary policy.

However, the unions have needed, if they are to appear credible, to look beyond the old Keynesian remedies of reflation via public spending as governments of both left and right have opted for deflationary measures and - even in France - denationalisation, the withdrawal of 'the stifling hand of the state' from business and a renewed faith in the entrepreneur have come to the fore.

Unions have had to rethink their economic prognoses and pay more attention to demonstrating the soundness of their arguments. The need to adapt has been keenly felt at workplace level where jobs are being displaced by technology and whole units are being shut down as 'uneconomic'.

No union can simply let this pass but neither can it simply repeat demands for jobs to be retained in the face of declining markets, cheaper competition or product obsolescence. Thus, unionists have had to answer employers' demands for 'flexibility'; they have argued for a shorter working week, sometimes accepting novel

rotas; and they have foregone wage rises for even temporary job reprieves.

A major problem facing unions in many countries, one which undermines their power at both national and workplace level, is membership loss. In part, this 'deunionisation' is the result of the fall in employment in traditional centres of union strength and the parallel failure to organise in newer sectors and among women, youth, etc, as noted above.

But there is a wider problem - a trend towards individualised work relations. This may be due to conscious employer policy (Dourdan I and II; Morville, 1985; Vacarie 1979), the decline in class consciousness (Touraine et al, 1984) or wider societal and cultural trends. It is not a problem that is likely to go away soon.

### The Crisis of French Trade Unionism

The French labour movement is particularly affected by the problems listed above and there is widespread agreement that unionism there is in crisis (see Landier, 1981; Adam, 1983; the analyses of the CFDT, etc).

The level of unionisation is not the best indicator of union influence or power in France but the fact remains that, as a percentage of the workforce, it is around the lowest in the developed world and falling. Worse, this dwindling membership is spread among five rival Confederations, divided along political,



philosophical, religious and sectoral lines, plus a host of autonomous Federations and syndicats.

A union of unemployed workers has sprung up and, even if its media attention looks overdone<sup>(3)</sup>, it has served to highlight the embarrassing failure of the Confederations to organise here, despite sporadic efforts.

Compounding the problem of deunionisation is demobilisation. Again, this will be treated at length later: suffice to note here that the number of days lost due to strikes was at a 20 year low in 1984 when fieldwork for this thesis was begun.

The largest union, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), has repeatedly failed in its attempts to call general strikes or demonstrations. Workers at its 'bastion', Renault, have mostly failed to follow calls for action to oppose job losses. Elsewhere in the car industry, and in steel, there have been outbreaks of violence but ultimately little success in fighting cutbacks, even if certain 'social' measures have been conceded by the authorities, as palliatives.

In the mid-1970's, the two largest unions at the time, the CGT and the Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT), banked a great deal on the election of a Left government and mobilised towards that political end, neglecting matters closer to the ground. They paid for this when the Union of the Left (Socialists, Communists and Left Radicals) fell apart in acrimony prior to the 1978 elections (Johnson, 1981).

Demoralisation set in amongst militants and if CGT-CFDT 'unity-in-action' spluttered on formally, the paths of the two Confederations began to diverge significantly.

The CFDT adopted a 'recentrage', refocussing on bread and butter demands closer to the workplace and giving fresh priority to bargaining. More radically, in the field of industrial policy, the CFDT began to develop a 'syndicalisme de propositions' - mobilising behind 'counter-plans' in opposition to the closedowns, redundancies and cutbacks demanded by employers. Social transformation was still the avowed aim but the accent was placed on autonomous union action in the industrial and economic fields (Lange et al, 1982: 60).

At one point, the CGT seemed to be moving in a similar direction but eventually took a more 'traditional' line, falling in behind Communist Party (PCF) attacks on the Socialists and then the CFDT (Lange et al, 1982; Ross, 1984: 74-84).

Thus, neither Confederation, for different reasons, had much to do with the election of François Mitterrand as President in May 1981 and the Socialist Party (PS) landslide in the subsequent legislative elections.

Nonetheless, both clearly expected a great deal from the new government which included four PCF ministers. The other three Confederations, less or not at all involved in the political fortunes of the Left, were more reserved in their reception.

However, there was a general air of expectancy abroad in June 1981. This, after all, was the first Left

government since the immediate post-World War Two coalition - and that is remembered with no great affection on the Left, perhaps because it presided over a sharp fall in working class incomes and because many had much more revolutionary expectations at the time. Left emotions are more aroused by memories of the 1936 Popular Front government even if its real achievements were small beside those of the post-war coalition (Johnson, 1981: 23-32).

On the non-Communist Left (and even among certain groups in the centre) expectations were high. And if the minority position of the PCF vis-à-vis the Socialists was a source of disquiet for the former, in the circumstances it had little choice but to go into talks and accept the four ministerial portfolios offered it.

In the labour movement, the CFDT in particular was keen to grasp the opportunities offered by the unexpected turn of events and many of its supporters found their way into ministerial cabinets or other official positions.

Yet the Socialist victory was not without ambiguities for the union movement. Similar problems had faced unions in other countries - in the UK, Australia and Spain, for example: in a period of economic crisis, how far should the unions go in supporting a Left government (in return for, say, nationalisations, welfare packages or job programmes) and national priorities at the expense of sectoral interests and wages? Can a trade union give priority to broad

political considerations over its own industrial and economic concerns? Should the unions demand that governments subsidise 'lame duck' industries on mainly job considerations?

There were other problems more peculiar to France, however.

The French labour movement is usually described as having two wings - one 'reformist', comprising the autonomous and idiosyncratic Force Ouvrière (FO), the Christian CFTC and the cadres union, CGC; and the other 'revolutionary', made up of the CGT and CFDT.

If revolutionary is a misnomer, at least the latter two aim for a wholesale transformation of society towards socialism. However, this is meant in different senses by each and there are further differences of emphasis inside each Confederation. Neither has any experience of working with a 'friendly' government; neither - and this is the crucial point - can be seen to be working too closely with any government because of the French attachment to non-alignment in their unions.

This concept dates from the Amiens Congress of the CGT in 1906. What came to be known as 'La Charte d'Amiens' affirms the independence of the union from any political grouping and its intention to organise all workers of whatever political or philosophical persuasion, as long as they do not introduce into the union 'the opinions they hold outside', that is, political reasoning or motivation.

The union aims to improve workers' conditions but

this is only one aspect of its role: it also works towards the emancipation of the workers, the overthrow of capitalism by means of a general strike. (Text reproduced in Reynaud, 1975b: 26-7).

While there is an evident revolutionary syndicalist influence in the Charter, most observers underline the tactical considerations of the period. Some unionists wanted to forge closer links with the Socialists, unified in a single party the previous year. Yet it was a fragile alliance<sup>4</sup> and unionists were concerned not to import squabbling into the union. Hence the alignment behind a syndicalist motion, "une conception du syndicalisme comme se suffisant à lui-même, assumant la totalité des intérêts de la classe ouvrière et porteur de son avenir." (Mouriaux, 1982: 42). (A) <sup>(\*)</sup>

The Charter is thus less a rejection of politics than an assertion that the union can look after the interests of the working class; between the lines, a certain scorn for political parties can be detected:

...l'apolitisme n'est donc pas prudence  
ou réserve, encore moins repli sur des  
préoccupations purement professionnelles...La  
Charte d'Amiens est moins un pacte de  
neutralité (même si elle a servi tactiquement  
à neutraliser les tendances opposées qui  
coexistaient dans le mouvement) qu'une  
proclamation de méfiance à l'égard de toute  
l'organisation politique. (Reynaud, 1975a: 68) (B)

Today, the Charter is interpreted in various ways by the different Confederations - FO, in particular, frequently cites it to support its brand of apolitical unionism but the revolutionary aspects are forgotten.

However, the main purpose in devoting space to Amiens here is to underline the difficult position of the union movement vis-à-vis an ostensibly 'friendly' government.

For the notion of non-alignment still carries enormous normative weight in France. Several things follow from this. Any union which appears to endorse a government programme - however edged with caveats - is open to sanction from members, the wider workforce and, crucially, the other Confederations. Inter-Confederation vitriol is an enduring feature of French union life and this whatever the ad hoc alliances which may obtain.

Reaction, naturally, is likely to be even more hostile if the government subsequently takes steps which directly hit wages and jobs. The CGT has been harmed by its association with the PCF: it has suffered even more with the PCF in government. The CFDT, closely associated with the PS in the public mind, has also been seriously compromised and, as will become clear, has reacted by accelerating its move towards 'reformism', at the cost of internal dissent.

A French Confederation is unlikely ever to negotiate the sort of Social Contract agreed between the British TUC and the Labour government in the late 1970s. FO, the

reformist union which argues strongly for 'la politique contractuelle' and negotiations as the best means to safeguard the workers' interests is perhaps the most hostile to any alliance with government or the State.

Besides, a divided movement could probably never agree in its entirety to any contract and certainly Confederations would not have the discipline to make it stick on the ground.

The fundamental anti-capitalism of much of the French labour movement also has implications for union activity on job losses. Until very recently, any attempt to intervene positively in matters such as work organisation and industrial restructuring was seen as tantamount to class collaboration by the CGT and CFDT, while FO tends not to see any legitimate role in such areas, beyond comment and action if necessary to oppose harmful effects.

As we will see, this position has altered considerably - at least as regards the CGT and CFDT - over the last decade and both unions saw the possibility of real advance under the Left government. Actual results have been disappointing - but the Mitterrand presidency has helped cement this fundamental change in union thinking, even if contradictions persist.

A further ambiguity of this period centres on the nature of the link between the CGT and the PCF: for present purposes, it is enough to suggest that the CGT represented a potential source of contestation for as long as PCF ministers were 'hostages' in the government

and the Party itself had to rein back criticism of the Socialists.

Yet the PCF was unable to turn on the CGT 'tap' at will: indeed, the stresses caused by this period of Left government opened up cracks in an organisation usually portrayed as homogenous, not to say monolithic.

Finally, this period saw an attempt to alter the face of French industrial relations. Institutional regulation of conflict is weak in France and bargaining is not well developed: negotiations have typically been seen as the formal endorsement of positions reached through a trial of strength rather than a method of resolving conflicts of interest.

The Socialists introduced an annual obligation on employers to negotiate on wages and work time at firm level. Parallel to and somewhat predating this legislation, the CFDT began to adopt a more positive approach to bargaining and, as with the union's attitude to industrial plans, this period of Socialist rule has helped underpin the trend.

The employers - individually and in their peak organisation - were at first defensive in 1981 but soon moved back onto the offensive as the Socialist government backtracked on economic policy and espoused notions of 'flexibility' dear to managers. The influence of employer attitudes on union behaviour remains important in France and some of the changes referred to above may be arrested or deformed because of the



anti-unionism which still prevails among a large number of employers.

It will be obvious from the above that if the Mitterrand victory in May 1981 opened up a new era in French political and economic life, that date does not coincide precisely with particular changes in trade union attitudes and behaviour. However, changing political perspectives both prior to and from May 1981 were as important to union development as structural change in the economic, industrial and social fields which provided the impetus. In particular, the septennat provided a fertile period for new initiatives to develop in response to the evident need for unions to adapt traditional policies.

A central test of the unions' ability to adapt lay in their reaction to employment problems, which entailed reflection on questions of work organisation and company management, particularly in the old manufacturing industries which were both heavy users of labour and centres of union strength. The research therefore focused on this area.

However, the substantial change in labour legislation enacted during the period has not been neglected. Certain aspects - greater access to information and resources, the right to discuss working conditions - potentially favoured changes underway in union thinking.

### The Hypotheses

The central problem, then, was whether, in the context of a period of Left government and in the face of mass unemployment, French trade unions would be prepared to argue and act for piecemeal reform of the industrial and economic system, or whether the 'revolutionaries' would continue to mobilise for wholesale political transformation and the 'reformists' limit themselves to bread-and-butter issues.

The nature (or absence) of significant change from 1981 was to be explained although that date was, from the beginning, seen as a somewhat artificial cut-off point. As suggested above, a better periodisation might begin with the collapse of the Union de la Gauche in 1977-8, while individual Confederations have reacted to different external and internal stimuli at different dates.

The working hypotheses fell under four broad headings relating to:

- a) the decentralisation of union activity;
- b) the 'rationalisation' of French industrial relations;
- c) the saliency of party-union links;
- d) the reassertion of 'maximalism' in the CGT and beyond.

It was suspected that regional dislocations caused by industrial restructuring would lead to a shift in the

focus of trade union activity, away from the national stage down to regional and company level. Important changes in labour legislation would underpin this change: indeed, the very aim of the 1982 Auroux laws seemed to be the institutionalisation of conflict at firm level, with strengthened unions having more access to financial and industrial information, understanding employers' problems and incorporating these into their analyses and demands (Hypothesis one).

However, hostility on the part of the employers, especially as regards any enlarged area of negotiation, was likely to undermine the application of the Auroux laws. Furthermore, even the aim of stimulating more wage bargaining seemed unlikely to be realised due to the unpromising economic climate (Hypothesis two).

The continuing saliency of party-union links, and especially the PCF-CGT connection, was seen as central, given the French concept of non-aligned unionism, outlined above. I envisaged the PCF, declining as a political force, tightening its grip on its major industrial asset, the CGT<sup>(4)</sup> (the third hypothesis) and this had implications for CGT action on job losses and industrial restructuring.

In particular, this presaged a revival of CGT 'maximalism' (Hypothesis four): by maximalism was meant (following Lange et al, 1982: 10 and 74) the outlook which sees the only way out of crisis as entailing a fundamental break with capitalist economic and social arrangements, that break being effected by prior

political change. This involved the control of the state apparatus with the union mobilising to that end, subjugating its industrial role to the requirements of a political party. Piecemeal reform of the economic system via union pressure was not contemplated.

In the post-May 1981 context, then, even the structural reforms implemented by the Socialist-Communist government were seen as inadequate and maximalism implied an ouvrieriste (or 'hard Left') emphasis on the mass mobilisation of the working class, the defence of traditional industries and the denunciation of those unions which tempered their criticism of the government and employers as 'collaborationist'.

The absence of visible political links helped FO to bolster its reputation as an 'independent' union which fought for the workers irrespective of the colour of the government. The fifth hypothesis was that FO's advance would be arrested as CGT opposition revived and that the CFDT, lacking the solid doctrinal base of the larger Confederation and suffering from a pro-government image, would to a certain extent be towed along in the CGT's wake.

In France, unions have tended to compete for members and votes in workplace elections by aggressive rhetoric and action, seeking to 'outbid' their rivals' demands, upping the stakes repeatedly to appear more concerned than the others with the workers' interests. (See Rioux, 1972: 18-19 and Mothé, 1973: especially chapter four,

for this concept of 'surenchère').

Thus, I initially expected more outright opposition to plant closures than reasoned 'counter-plans', even if action and mots d'ordre were more differentiated at a local level than in the past (Hypothesis six).

Lange, Ross and Vannicelli, in their book on union attitudes towards the economic recession of the 1970s, Unions, Change and Crisis (1982), argue that the Italian and French movements did not fundamentally change their framework of analysis of the economy with the onset of crisis; rather, they reacted to that crisis 'on the basis of frameworks which had been developed prior to crisis and in other circumstances' (Lange et al, 1982: 8).

For these authors, 'the nature of union-politics relationships was the most important variable in explaining different union responses to crisis' (Lange et al, 1982: 9). Thus, the dramatic change in the political life of France following the Socialist success of May/June 1981 was expected to fundamentally alter union attitudes and behaviour.

Lange and his colleagues (the French section was principally the work of George Ross) chose to compare the evolution of Italian unions with those of the French Confederations. Writing just as the Socialist and Communist ministers took office, they forecast that changes in France were likely to be dramatic, in contrast to the tentative integration of the Italian

Communist Party (PCI) into the 'government arena' in the mid-1970s.

Central to the evolution of Italian unionism was the relative openness of the PCI and its willingness to relax its grip on the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL), the main union confederation.

The CGIL was then obliged to adapt in the face of a threat to its dominant position from the Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (CISL). As a result, it began to focus more directly on bread-and-butter issues such as wages and to work for the reform of the Italian state and industry, seeking not a new mode of accumulation beyond capitalism but a new type of development within capitalism.

The French Communist Party is widely seen as one of the more 'hardline' of Western parties: a brief flirtation with 'Eurocommunism' (Ross, 1980) was brought to an end when the PS seemed to be gaining most from the 'unitary' approach and developments abroad (Afghanistan, Poland) saw the French party once more lining up behind the Soviet Union.

The links between the PCF and the CGT are well documented (see esp. Ross, 1982). It is enough here to note that nearly all of the CGT Federations and regional bodies are headed by Communists. A careful balance between PCF and non-PCF members is maintained on the Bureau Confédéral but the composition of Federation and Regional teams, plus the 'filtering' of delegates to the triennial conference, ensures that the Party link

(remembering the Leninist 'transmission belt' formula for such links) is a vital factor in CGT orientations.

One of the hypotheses centred on this factor and particularly the likely effect of the decline in the PCF vote in 1981, confirmed in subsequent elections. The dismal showing of the the PCF leader and presidential candidate Georges Marchais set off debates as to strategy and analyses within the Party.

I thought that some unionists might take advantage of this weakness to loosen the Party-union links, long seen as a liability in some quarters, but that the more likely outcome was that the Party would look to the CGT as its main asset in rebuilding its oppositionist credentials (its departure from government always seemed likely, sooner or later) and would therefore seek to tighten its grip on the union.

As for the other Confederations, the CFDT has been harmed by its association (in the public mind, due in part to a certain affinity of vision with some elements of the PS) with the government.

This, as noted above, gave FO and the other two Confederations the possibility of enlarging their audience.

The implications of this for the complex balance between the Confederations are outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. Briefly here, this period of left rule seems to have confirmed the isolation of the CGT and what some see as its historic decline, while a majority for 'reformism' now appears to exist - though this majority

remains a heterogeneous, contradictory grouping, still prone to violent disagreement.

I hypothesised that once the CGT's period of 'soutien critique' was over, the progress of the 'reformist' unions would be arrested or reversed. In fact, the CGT's decline does not seem to have ended and - more important - it has not managed, with rare exception, to set the pace in trade union matters as it once could.

There has been a reassertion of maximalism within CGT ranks - but this has not been a strong influence on the other Confederations. The CFDT in particular has continued on its novel if unsteady path towards a 'syndicalisme de propositions'.

However, the CGT's maximalism has perhaps changed form since it too now tends to propose 'counter-solutions' in troubled firms and branches: a central place in this thesis is given over to an examination of the nature of CGT plans, especially in comparison with initiatives taken by the CFDT and, sometimes, the other Confederations.

I closely studied union action in four firms where there have been disputes over jobs - Renault, SKF, Kodak-Pathé and Chapelle Darblay. By talking to activists and analysing union proposals, I have detected a shift in emphasis in recent years towards a more positive

'proposition force' unionism; and if the origins of this shift lie beyond May 1981, the



political changement then allowed it to develop and it is likely to persist, despite apparently meagre results.

If some unions are now prepared to tackle previously taboo subjects such as work organisation and industrial policy, does this imply a move away from 'class' unionism and a desire for a more contractual form of industrial relations?

The signs here are contradictory but, as regards the CFDT at least, there has been considerable movement. At Confederation level, and in certain influential Federations, the CFDT seems to be edging towards the idea of bargaining as 'donnant-donnant', 'give and take'. This in itself is something of a revolution in France where negotiation is more often than not merely the formal recognition of positions reached after action by unions and where gains thus achieved ('acquis') are seen as sacrosanct. This is the position both of the CGT and, generally, of FO despite its attachment to la politique contractuelle and negotiation.

The CFDT's position is that in a period of crisis unions should not cling to acquis if their replacement or renovation might better serve the interests of workers.

This view was at the centre of the CFDT's 'openings' towards the employers in the talks on flexibility at the end of 1984. In many ways these negotiations encapsulated all the problems facing French unionism in the 1980s: the need to adapt to the economic and

industrial context; their relationship to the state, government and employers; the 'contract versus legislation' debate; the relationship of the centrale to the militant; inter-Confederation rivalry and so on. I have thus chosen to analyse these talks in some depth in Chapter 8.

The change of direction by the CFDT obviously has implications for the second hypothesis on the attempted 'rationalisation' of French industrial relations. By 'rationalisation', I mean the strengthening of workplace institutions with the intention of stimulating a more consensual treatment of conflict closer to the point of production, on the lines of relations prevalent elsewhere in northern Europe. It is evident that the PS government sought to take the heat out of union-employer (and union-government) relations which in France frequently boil over and pose a direct threat to the state (see, for example, Kesselman, 1983a).

As noted above, bargaining has never been as central to industrial relations in France as in the UK, the US, Sweden and elsewhere. The majority Confederations in France have hitherto been proponents of a unionism of mobilisation, seeking to put pressure on the state or employers through the establishment of favourable rapports de force. The 'reformists' have usually been in a minority.

This has not stopped agreements being made: one union, even one representing a minority, can legally sign an agreement on behalf of the whole workforce

concerned. Thus, a certain division of labour has been established - the CGT and CFDT mobilising and putting pressure on employers, FO signing where the first two have been reluctant, thereby consolidating the advances achieved (Reynaud, 1975a: 186).

Negotiations are difficult in the majority of firms and even at branch level they may entail little more than unilateral awards by the employers.

In this context, the introduction of an annual obligation to negotiate over wages and working time in firms where unions are organised constitutes a fundamental change in French industrial relations. I suggested in the second hypothesis that this law (one of a series on labour legislation known as the lois Auroux after the labour minister who introduced them in 1982) might not live up to the ambitions of its sponsors because of the difficult economic context and the hostility of the patronat. (Indeed, its introduction coincided with a government-imposed wages freeze...).

Thus far, the picture as regards results is far from clear. But employer practices have certainly evolved and there is now a much greater emphasis, from them, on firm-level negotiations, although the suspicion remains that the main intention is to circumvent unions rather than genuinely bargain with them.

Other aspects of the Auroux laws also tend to reinforce the emphasis on enterprise level affairs. The first hypothesis was that the provisions of these laws, plus administrative decentralisation and the effects of

restructuring, might help stimulate a 'syndicalisme de propositions' and indeed, a new-found interest in the details of company life has emerged which leads one to question the validity of what have been seen as the 'traditional models' of unionism in France.

At the outset, I felt that economic factors might both assist and constrain union development - assist, in that the problems posed to companies might be met by positive solutions from the union side; constrain, in that the problems were so severe and the French penchant for technocratic solutions administered by the Parisian industrial and civil service élites so ingrained that unions would be denied any significant role.

Both these suppositions were correct and even if FO is still reluctant to venture onto the terrain of industrial policy, the rest of the labour movement actively seeks to intervene here.

However, the 'political' variables were perhaps more instructive, overall, in explaining change - or regression - as Lange et al (1982) contended. Yet it is not only a question of union-party links or the party composition of government though the latter certainly helped cement a move towards 'positive' union contributions, a decentralisation of union activity and a greater willingness to bargain by some.

Beyond these factors, the specific French notion of political non-alignment has also proved to be vital to any understanding of recent developments on the French

labour scene. Not only has it helped bolster the influence of FO at the expense of the CGT and CFDT: it has also spurred the renewed striving for autonomy by the CFDT which has led it towards an acceptance of bargaining as the centrepiece of industrial relations and the search for a union role in industrial strategy in the mixed economy.

### Fieldwork

Work in the field was undertaken at the end of 1984 and the first six months of 1985. As explained above, I focused on four firms with employment problems where there had been well publicised action over jobs and interviewed activists and regional officials concerned.

My schedule of open-ended questions related to the position of the particular firm but also to wider matters - the government's achievements, the state of the economy, the 'flexibility' negotiations and the options facing a trade union under a Left government.

In all of the firms, one or more of the unions had printed copies of their analyses and proposals which I obtained: cuttings from the union, financial and general press supplemented these first-hand investigations.

During the same period I interviewed officials concerned with economic and industrial policy in all the major Confederations as well as participants in the 'flexibility' negotiations from both the union and employer sides and I was able to attend three Confederal conferences.

The union press was analysed in depth from September 1984 to June 1985 and I was able to consult issues going back to May 1981 and beyond where necessary.

An extensive literature search was undertaken before commencement of the fieldwork though, as indicated above, recent developments suggest some of the 'classic' works need to be brought up to date.

A detailed examination of the new and existing (pre-1981) legislation was undertaken and activists questioned on the real impact of the changes in the workplace.

#### NOTES

1. There were 4.74 million workers employed in manufacturing industry in France in 1984 against 5.46 mln in 1976; in the UK, there were 5.53 million in 1984 against 7.28 million in 1976. (Year Book of Labour Statistics (1986) Geneva: ILO).

2. See the ETUC document, Work and Workers in the Society of Tomorrow, Milan Conference, May 1985; and the papers presented to the ECWS conference on 'The Role of Trade Unions in the Coming Decade', Maastricht, 20th-22nd November 1985. A selection of the papers is now published in Spyropoulos (ed.) (1986).

3. A call to a national demonstration in Paris in May 1985 met with little response.

4. The Party split again in 1920 after the Communist majority won the Tours Congress vote on membership of the Third International (Fauvet, 1977).

5. All main quotations in French are marked with a capital letter and translations (my own) appear at the end of each chapter, following the numbered notes.

It was decided to use the original quotations in the body of the text to retain more of the flavour of union life in France, certain expressions having only approximate counterparts in English. For a brief discussion of the difficulties of translation in this branch of the social sciences, see the note by Michael Rose and myself in Rose (ed.) (1987).

Throughout the text, an effort has been made to use non-sexist terminology. Where 'he', 'his', etc have been unavoidable, it is not, of course, intended to convey that all activists, union leaders, employers or whatever are male.

6. Of course, the Party still enjoyed control of a significant number of town and regional councils plus a solid, if declining, body of loyal members, not to mention important business interests.

#### TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

(A) '... a conception of trade unionism as being sufficient in itself, taking in all the interests of the working class whose future lies with it.' (Mouriaux, 1982: 42).

(B) '... so this apolitical attitude is neither prudence nor reserve, even less a retreat into purely

sectional concerns... The Amiens Charter is less a pact of neutrality (even if it served tactically to neutralise the tendencies which opposed each other within the movement) than a proclamation of mistrust towards all forms of political organisation.' (Reynaud, 1975a: 68).



## 1. TRADE UNIONISM AND FRENCH 'EXCEPTIONALISM'

A trade union is, first and foremost, an agency and a medium of power. Its central purpose is to permit workers to exert, collectively, the control over their conditions of employment which they cannot hope to possess as individuals; and to do so largely by compelling the employer to take account, in policy- and decision-making, of interests and priorities contrary to his own. (Hyman, 1975: 64)

That definition (by a British Marxist scholar) would appear uncontroversial at a basic analytical level and might seem applicable to any union in the Western industrialised world. Yet, in a survey of the labour movements of Europe, Kendall (1975: 38) notes that:

In the past the worker's decision to join a union (in France) has represented at least as much a reflex of class consciousness as any intent to organize in a practical fashion for better conditions and improved job control.

With its divisions, its numerical weakness and its various ideological bases, the French labour movement

has always been something of a 'deviant' case in the industrialised world. Its majority wing has been termed 'maximalist' (Lange et al, 1982: 10) in that it has usually seen the best prospects for advancing working class interests as lying in the political arena - involving a rupture with capitalism - and it has therefore mobilised to this end. Partly for ideological reasons (a refusal to 'collaborate' with capitalism) and partly because employers have anyway proved reluctant to see the unions as industrial partners in France and bargaining structures are weak, the CGT has preferred to advance via legislation rather than through negotiated contracts with employers: it has typically, then, tried to rally large numbers of workers behind strikes called with the intent of applying political pressure on the state, a tactic which has brought significant gains in terms of legislation and even pay rises - as in 1936 and 1968 - when the government felt a greater urgency to settle than the patronat.

However, a 'reformist' wing has been prepared to negotiate and recent changes in the labour movement suggest an eclipse of the majority 'revolutionary' tradition in France. The differences between the Confederations and an examination of the industrial relations system (or systems) in France form the basis of the following three chapters: in the rest of this chapter I am more interested in examining the 'exceptionalism' of French unionism at a theoretical level and highlighting specific features such as its

radicalism which have set it apart from other models.

#### Trade Unions - Opponents of Capitalism?

On the basis of a study across several countries from 1900 to 1956, Ross and Hartman (1960) forecast a 'withering away of the strike' as a form of union action. Class antagonism was waning and unions were more active in the political arena, as now constituted, where they seemed to act as little more than pressure groups on the government.

Flanders (in McCarthy, 1972; and Flanders, 1968) also sees a decline in class antagonism: conflict exists but is managed through 'rules' which unions have helped elaborate to obtain protection from the market and employers. The resulting 'system' is characterised by agreement and compromise, a mutual recognition of interests by both sides of industry (see Poole, 1981: 61).

Others who take the pluralist view, Clegg, for example, see unions as oppositional institutions (in McCarthy, 1972) within the existing socio-economic framework. Collective bargaining structures (when they exist) are seen by him as the main determinant of trade union behaviour, though France proved an exception since political action rather than negotiation was the main concern of unions there (Clegg, 1976).

Some authors have seen this apparent decline in conflictual social relations as a universal feature of advanced societies. Thus, Kerr et al (1973) saw labour

protest waning and the power of ideology declining in the face of an industrialising process which had common features in all developed countries due to the similarity of the technical problems to be faced. A 'web of rules' develops in the work place: workers are no longer attracted by alternatives to the prevailing industrial order and seek only to increase their share in the gains... Protest is most apparent in what these authors term a 'glacial impact', that is, through the establishment and functioning of formal procedures through which industrial relations problems are processed. All this is widely accepted by the workforce: indeed, labour leaders may even form part of the 'élite' which oversees the industrialising process. In short:

The road to industrialisation is paved  
less with class warfare than with class  
alliances (Kerr et al, 1973: 226)

and

the 'iron law of technology' (292) (allowing for the stage of development and some autonomy in the élite's strategic policy decisions) sees industrial structures in all countries converging towards a 'relative uniformity' in what some modern analysts term the 'regulation of labour' (See the works by Boyer and Coriat).

Yet, Gallie's cross-national research (1978) has shown that similar technology does not at all lead to any convergence in industrial relations systems. Kerr et

al specifically referred to refineries (where Gallie did his survey) as examples of the deterministic effect of technology, but Gallie (1978: 315) found that

the advanced sector tends to become to a considerable degree assimilated into the broader social-structural patterns of the particular society in which it emerges.

Hyman (1975) sees the view of trade unionism as being essentially involved in job regulation as reflecting conservative sociological preoccupations centred on the desirability of order. Writing from a Marxist perspective, he is as much concerned with how conflict is generated as with the way it is controlled. Those authors who see the trade union function as revolving around collective bargaining (eg. Flanders 1968) are for Hyman simply making deductions on the basis of what unions currently do. Both external pressures (ideological and economic, primarily) and internal ones (the need for organisational preservation, for instance) push unions, or union leaders, in this direction.

However, such incorporation cannot eliminate conflict which is inherent in the capitalist system and may simply lead to higher incidences of unorganised dissent such as absenteeism or sabotage:

... efforts to suppress specific manifestations of conflict, without removing

the underlying causes of unrest, may merely divert disorder into different channels (Hyman, 1975: 189).

Furthermore, action remains at the heart of a trade union's function: collective bargaining is mere ritual unless backed up by the threat of collective action. Thus, for Hyman (1975: 190) it is quite in order to present 'industrial conflict as the central reality of industrial relations'.

Hyman, like other authors in the late 1970s (especially, Crouch and Pizzorno (Eds) 1978) saw the rise in industrial conflict in western industrialised nations as proof that institutionalisation was not without contradictions.

However, it is far from clear what sort of opposition to existing social arrangements this industrial conflict implied and what the specific role of the unions was within this rising tide of discontent. Certainly, some of the essays in the Crouch and Pizzorno volumes show national unions struggling to take over issues which involve groups and concerns beyond their traditional constituencies.

On a broader theoretical level, the view of the trade union as an oppositional working class organism is not without problems. The classic Marxist view is usually taken to be that of Lenin in What Is To Be Done? (1902) in which he states that, left to itself, a labour movement is only capable of stimulating 'trade union

consciousness' which aimed no higher than piecemeal economic (or sometimes political) advance within the capitalist system. The workers only achieved class consciousness when their mass organisations were guided by the vanguard in the revolutionary political parties.

Now, Hyman (1971: 41-3) has argued that this view was only held by Lenin at a specific period and both before and after (especially after the events of 1905) he considered trade union action to have a pedagogic function in raising the political consciousness of the masses. Hyman himself (1971: 50-3) takes the view that the limits of 'trade union consciousness' vary markedly depending on the historical context and material improvements can be either palliatives or stimulants depending on whether they are conceded by or snatched from the employers. Therefore, 'no general theory is available to relate the struggle for material reforms to the development of consciousness'. However, he appears to follow Gramsci and the theorists of the British Shop Stewards' Movement such as Cole in advancing the potential of 'encroaching control', social revolution as a process rather than an act:

... while such theories need not exclude the perspective of a 'classic' revolutionary climax, they emphasise the possibility and even the necessity of inroads within capitalism as a basis for eventual transition to socialism (1971: 47).

This conclusion is particularly interesting as regards the case of the labour movement in France since the relative merits of the revolutionary grand soir and the potentiality of piecemeal reform have long been the subject of debate in that country.

In the next chapter I will show that several 'models' of unionism co-exist in France<sup>(1)</sup> including one which espouses the sort of consensual approach outlined at the start of this section. However, here I address the question of why a radical trade unionism persists there and what form of activism this gives rise to - a militantisme which is currently in decline and contributing to the problems of the French trade union movement.

### Radical Unionism in France

In his book on Consciousness and Action among the Western Working Class, Mann (1973) concluded that the working class did not carry within itself a new form of social order, that revolutionary consciousness was unlikely to develop in most capitalist countries.

Yet Mann was careful to make a distinction as regards Italian and, especially, French workers. He was, after all, writing just five years after the May 1968 explosion and there is ample survey evidence to show that workers in France are more radical than those of other countries even if the nature and extent of this



radicalism is the source of lively academic debate (Gallie 1978 and 1983; Hamilton 1967; Lash 1984).

Mann himself (1973: 71) argues that socialism is not spontaneous but a learned process, the product of 'the continuous experience of the worker in his productive life and the interpretation of this experience by organised groups over a considerable period of time'.

When discussing international variations in consciousness (Ch. 4), Mann sees union doctrines as central: 'reformist' unions focus on wages and sign away job controls and, with no alternatives formulated by their leading elements, workers reconcile themselves to the existing situation; whereas 'revolutionary' unions 'foster job dissatisfaction' and workers renew demands for control. Leaving aside the question of control for the time being (French unions have been ambiguous in their attitude to control issues within a capitalist system) it should be noted that the centrality of unions to this dissatisfaction (and therefore radicalism) in France has been questioned, not least by Gallie (1983: 115):

Overall, what is striking is that even non-unionised French workers would appear to be highly radical in their social attitudes ... and exposure to CGT doctrine would appear primarily to heighten what is already an exceptionally high level of resentment among French workers.

For Gallie, class resentment is generated by experience at work and only then built upon by left wing organisations; political parties 'can mould the political interpretation that workers give to their class resentments' (145) and in this respect their contribution is greater than that of the unions.

In fact, Gallie argues (1983: Ch 7) that union members in France choose their Confederation on the basis of pre-existing political attitudes. However, one might argue that unions in turn play a crucial role in support of the French Left by sustaining the workers' sense of social injustice (Hamilton, 1967; Mouriaux, 1981: 175).

For Hamilton (1967: 6), the objective work situation is less important than the 'perceptions of that situation, a frame of reference learned from "informal opinion leaders"'. Radicalism is not a 'natural' response to deprivation, it has to be brought out by unions.

However, Hamilton does feel there is more than one type of radicalism - a 'revolutionary' attitude which is a response to deprivation, part of a larger rural, radical tradition; and the 'Pro-Soviet' attitude which is actively shaped by a union or party. The former, of course, can 'feed' the latter, with rural radicals migrating to the cities where the 'point of entry' to industry is often controlled by the CGT which, with the PCF, is seen as providing the 'Pro-Soviet' frame of

reference.

Lash (1984) is even more insistent than Hamilton (and quite opposed to Gallie) in stressing the ideological and organisational determinants of militancy. Further, he sees French radicalism as primarily political: on industrial matters, the US workers he compared them with were more hostile to management and more inclined to collective action. In contrast to Gallie, Lash plays down the influence of the work situation and locates the main determinants of radicalism in political and trade union socialisation, like Hamilton.

My own data do not throw any new light on this debate - that was not the purpose of the research in question. However, it was essential to highlight the radicalism of French workers in general and the part played by unions in either maintaining or even fostering this radicalism.

It should be clear that a union which seeks to radicalise its members (and the wider work force) with a view to changing economic and political structures will act quite differently to one which concentrates primarily on a representative function and the pursuit of immediate economic interests, or even one which allies these immediate concerns with wider social aims which it pursues through close links with a (usually) social democratic political party. In the next chapter, the effect of this on union doctrine and ideology is

examined; in the concluding sections here, the implications for members of a unionism of mobilisation are outlined.

#### Trade Union Activism in France

Reynaud (1975a: 130-3) notes that, in terms of decision-making, French Confederations are highly centralised, the national councils and in particular the Central Bureaux wielding effective power and the triennial conference reduced for the most part to a forum for discussion and the formal ratification of general orientations. However:

Cette centralisation et cette stabilité  
(des équipes dirigeantes) n'impliquent  
cependant pas que les confédérations soient  
très puissantes. Elles ont une grande autorité  
morale. Mais elles n'ont ni les moyens de  
contrôle ni les moyens financiers qui leur  
permettraient de diriger de manière  
autoritaire... Ils animent un corps de  
militants à qui ils présentent les vues  
d'ensemble et les politiques à long terme dont  
l'action locale a besoin, qui les respectent,  
mais sans que la discipline soit rigoureuse. (A)

There is often an uneasy relationship between the militant in the workplace, the full-time official and, especially, the appointed (unelected) headquarters

staff. (This is especially so in the CFDT, 'une organisation foncièrement anti-hiérarchique' according to Hamon and Rotman (1982; 360)).

Mothé (1973) divided French activists into three categories: the tribun who rallies the workers behind the union line though his power is rooted in the workshop; the doctrinaire who provides doctrinal coherence; and l'administratif who makes the organisation tick. Mothé reckons that French unionism is based predominantly on the first two, with full-time officials looked upon as somewhat 'impure' (due ironically to the success of the CGT in forcing home the ouvriériste message that real workers, the ones that produce the wealth, get their hands dirty) and Confederations in the past have seemed almost apologetic about recruiting 'experts'. His argument, in 1973, was that if French unions were to play their full part in social institutions and be really efficient and powerful (he used the Swedish example as a model), then technocrats and modern methods had to be brought in.

A decade later, some of these criticisms are no longer valid. Both the CGT and the CFDT boast new headquarters filled with modern equipment and extensive back-up staff.

However, the militant remains crucial in France: the vast majority of the workforce in most sectors is unorganised and for any action to succeed the militant has to convince these workers to back his section's demand (and, where necessary, oppose those of rival

sections). Where the call for action has come from the Confederation, Federation or local Union, the militant is required to translate demands or doctrine into concepts that the rank and file can grasp.

As disaffection with the main Confederations grows, the role of the militant is all the more important and any weakening of the link between union and activist will necessarily impact on this fragile link between union and worker. This is precisely what seems to be happening at present: there is a crise du militantisme which is a large factor in the crise du syndicalisme.

Rose (1984: 2) argues that the former signifies more than a simple fall-off in participation:

It is also a crisis for conventional expectations about the role of the union activist and its associated values: it is as much an uncertainty about viable and desirable patterns of behaviour - that is to say, about a normative model - as about a lack of recruits to militant activity as traditionally conceived.

Landier (1981: 131-2) seems to ascribe the main cause for the crisis in French unionism to the dashing of the Left's political hopes in 1977-8. However, he, too, sees a change in the form of activism, the quasi-religious devotion of (especially) PCF, CGT and CFDT activists being eroded in the face of rival,

perhaps more individual interests. (For Landier, this explains why those unions which require only a minimum commitment such as FO are less affected by the crise du militantisme). More limited, 'single issue' movements may have taken the place of unions with the decline of traditional industries, the change in the composition of the workforce and the waning of class consciousness (see also Touraine et al, 1984).

Analysis of this change has been pushed furthest by the CFDT (FO does not recognise any problem while the CGT tends to see the decline in membership in terms of the political and economic conjuncture).

Landier (1981: Annexe II) publishes CFDT leader Edmond Maire's May 1980 report on his Confederation's strategy to stem the decline in membership, which entails a recognition of socio-economic change in and beyond the workplace. Maire recognises that French unionism has worked better in snatching gains at moments of struggle rather than developing action with a view to more sustained, more enduring advances.

The key to consolidating real gains lay in building a solid membership base in each workplace and Maire outlined several steps needed to secure this, in particular a deeper analysis of concrete realities which affected the workforce, though without any jettisoning of the ideological bases of CFDT unionism; and the provision of services (credit schemes, cultural activities, discount shopping, insurance...) to attract members no longer swayed by the appeals to class

solidarity which may have worked in the past.

Daniel Vidal (1968) has suggested, based on a survey of the orientations of French militants, that union action and ideology are relatively autonomous. This may have some truth at the plant level, but the problems of the CFTD and the CGT in the 1970s invite caution: the overwhelming ideological and political content of action was clear (discontent was 'globalised' and national days of action became the preferred mode of expression) and the demoralisation which resulted from the failure of the Union de la Gauche alienated not only the non-unionised but members and activists, too.

Increasingly, however, the tensions between broad Confederation aims and workplace realities are partly overcome by the relative freedom given to syndicats to frame local demands, taking into account national policies. Consequently, the 1980s have seen a flowering of union 'proposals' in troubled firms but often within a framework, a general perspective, forged at a national level.

This does not mean that there is usually concertation between syndicats of rival Confederations. Quite the contrary: workplace life is still characterised by intense rivalry, with workers constantly faced with the need to choose between the Confederations - in elections for délégués and comités but also now for the election of Prud'hommes (who sit on industrial tribunals) and administrators for the social



security system. Because of these election campaigns the activist has to 'insister en permanence' (Mothé, 1973: 83-5) and the accent is put on the essential differences between the Confederations. Each activist has to assert the commitment of his or her syndicat and the corollary of this is that it will usually support any group of workers in dispute with management however hopeless the cause and however much a grievance might be based on misconceptions (Dubois et al, 1978: 73; Mothé, 1973: 121).

As a result, the potential for conflict is heightened and factory life in France is considerably more tense than in, say, Britain or Germany, with friction resulting from volatile relations between workers, unions and management continually feeding upon itself, fuelled by the hyperbole and rhetoric coming from all sides.

It might be argued with Hamilton (1967: 293) that at least this situation has pre-empted the bureaucratisation and tendency towards oligarchy that Michels (1915) said was characteristic of Left organisations. However, at local level - and often on the national stage, too - the main result would appear to be surenchère - each union trying to 'outbid' the others' demands or raise the stakes of action until claims become unrealisable and workers are alienated.

Lange et al (1982) have outlined the factors (the loosening of the PCI hold on the CGIL, the threat posed to the latter by the strengthening of the CISL, etc)

which prompted the Italian Confederations to work together in the 1970s: in France, such alliances seem as distant as ever. Ideology, electoral competition and the crucial position of militants schooled in confrontation unionism all contribute to French divisiveness and the ad hoc alliances formed in specific circumstances provide no basis for common solutions to the chronic problems faced by workers.

This is the background to the current 'crisis of unionism' which is affecting the French labour movement. The next chapter examines the internal differences in the French labour movement by looking at the history and the doctrine of the five main Confederations but this section ends with a study of the quantitative aspects of French unionism and of the meaning of union 'power' in France.

### Trade Union Membership in France

Any attempt at estimating the membership strength and financial resources of the French labour movement is fraught with difficulties: quite simply, the Confederations' own figures are not reliable. The most thorough examination of union numbers (and how these are arrived at) is in Landier (1981: Ch. II) on which much of the following is based.

In both the CGT and FO, members buy a card every year and each month a stamp should be bought and attached to the card: at the triennial conference of

both Confederations, each syndicat is then entitled to a vote for every ten monthly stamps placed. In actual fact, according to Landier and other observers, the average member at FO buys only 7.5 stamps and at the CGT less than six: Harmel (1982: 11) claims that 'several hundreds of thousands' of CGT pseudo-syndiqués only have one or two stamps.

The CFDT's card is free: the Confederation releases the number of 'regular subscribers', based on an 'average' member purchasing between eight and nine stamps per year. However, since membership is disrupted by various factors (redundancy, change of job, sickness, etc) the CFDT reckons that a third of its 'faithful' members 'suspend their membership' each year and it takes this into account when giving overall membership figures.

In terms of stamps placed, which Landier sees as the most objective criterion of the direct influence of each Confederation, FO and the CGT were equal at 7.5 million each; the CFDT was some way behind at seven million (on 1979 figures).

His estimate of CGT membership in 1980 was 1,450,000 (excluding retired members) based on internal figures supplied by each Union Départementale.

The CGT General Secretary Henri Krasucki stated on a TV programme in October 1984 that his Confederation had between 1.3 million and 1.4 million active plus around 300,000 retired members.

Landier (cited in Libération of 28th March 1985) has

estimated the 1984 membership at just 870,000. The French metal and mining industries' employers' organisation, the UIMM, came up with a similar figure of 835,000 for 1984 on the basis of internal CGT statistics. This represents a fall of over fifty percent in just ten years. The CGT's merchant navy federation which - rare if not unique among CGT constituents - situates itself amongst the opposition to the CGT leadership spoke of the Confederation having 'less than 800,000 members' at its 1985 conference (cited in Le Monde's report of the UIMM study, 7th November 1985).

In March 1985, the CGT launched an appeal for funds, ostensibly to 'give itself the means' to fight the government's 'anti-working class' policies. However, the financial strain caused by the construction and equipment of the new Montreuil headquarters and the staffing costs there have obviously been aggravated by the decline in membership (See Le Matin, 25th March 1985).

The financial position of the CFDT appears to be healthier but it, too, has suffered an erosion of its membership since the mid-1970s. In 1980 it claimed 790,922 'regular' members out of an overall membership of 963,200, excluding retired workers numbering some 75,000 (Hamon and Rotman, 1982: 413). The official figures for 1983 were 681,000 and 885,671 respectively (Le Monde, 11th June 1985) and an official 1983 figure of 967,170 including retired members is reported in

Témoignage Chrétien of 10th-16th June 1985.

According to the figures released at its November 1984 conference, FO had 1,150,000 members in 1982 and was therefore entitled to boast that it had become the second largest Confederation. On the basis of FO's financial report, Landier estimated its membership at 983,000 in 1978 and so what he suggested was a regular three percent rise in membership may have been maintained.

However, it should be noted that FO Magazine, in theory distributed to each member, only had a print run of just over 700,000 in 1984 (Liaisons Sociales, Document W/210, 19th December 1984) and the UIMM study very cautiously advanced a figure of 600,000 members.

In the absence of any financial or other data on which to base any estimate, Landier, in 1981, repeats the CFTC's own figure of 250,000 members. At its November 1984 conference, the Confederation claimed 280,000 members while the UIMM study opts for a figure of 200,000.

The same study offers a figure of 150,000 for the CGC in 1983, around half the total officially claimed. Le Monde of 16th October 1984 suggests a figure of 143,000 'regular dues payers'. UGICT, the cadres union of the CGT, claims 320,000 members, already included in the overall Confederation total, while UCC-CFDT claims

50,000, UCI-FD 60,000 and UGICA-CFTC 10,000. However, these cadre unions organise different categories and figures are not strictly comparable.

The autonomous teachers' union FEN claimed 540,000 members in 1977 and officially had 451,000 in 1984 (Le Matin, 4th February 1985) but external observers have suggested a figure of just 300,000 is closer (Libération, 9th-10th February 1985).

A variety of independent unions exist, forever prey to schisms or just simply disappearing to re-emerge under a new sigle. The Confédération Nationale du Travail, of anarchist inspiration, has existed since the war while the Confédération Générale des Syndicats Indépendants, formed after the war by unionists who had been active in Vichy-sanctioned syndicats, Communists who had left the party in 1939 and Gaullists seeking to give the General's working class constituency some roots, survived until 1977 when it merged with the CFTC.

Special mention should be made of the Confédération des Syndicats Libres which is well implanted in the Citroen and Talbot car factories but whose trade union credentials are disputed. It sometimes seems to function as the disciplinary arm of management and bitter, often violent, disputes have seen it in direct confrontation with the many immigrant workers employed by the Peugeot group (Benoit, 1982; Lopes, 1984).

Autonomous syndicats exist in many industries and firms and exert a real influence in some sectors (for

example, the state railways, the Parisian metro and bus system, the police and freight transport, though the lorry drivers who caused such chaos at the beginning of 1984 tended to be owner-drivers)<sup>(2)</sup>.

Union membership in France has always been volatile but now, as in many other countries, it is falling sharply. The UIMM study estimates unionisation at only 13.85 percent or 15 percent if FEN and the various independent unions are included. Even if this is a study conducted by an employers' organisation, there is little doubt that it is as accurate an appraisal as the statistical data will allow.

Landier (1981: 68-70) argues that the crisis of unionism in France is in fact the crisis of a certain type of unionism - the politicised, militant, confrontation unionism practised by the CGT and the CFDT, especially in the 1970s. There is some basis in fact for this assertion: CGT and CFDT membership began to fall back from 1976 and 1977 respectively, at the height of the mobilisation behind the Union de la Gauche banner. Conditions on the ground were neglected (as the CFDT's Maire subsequently admitted) and demoralisation really set in when the electoral pact of the PS and PCF fell apart in acrimony.

However, what is contestable in Landier's thesis is the assertion that the 'reformist' unions (with the exception of the CGC, beset by specific problems relating to the categories it recruits) are making

steady progress in terms of membership. Quite simply, the available data are insufficient to substantiate such claims for either FO or the CFTC. Indeed, the report presented to the CFTC conference in 1984 (p.35) states that electoral progress has not been translated into any rise in membership which had remained stable overall 'for several years', though that in itself may be seen as an achievement.

What is undeniable is that FO and the CFTC have scored big successes with the general public and the non-unionised workforce. As outlined earlier, union activism in France is different to that practised in the UK, the US and most other developed countries in that, routinely, unions need to win over non-members to win disputes: the response of such workers is crucial when only a minority of employees in most firms are unionised.

The influence of each Confederation is regularly tested in France by workplace elections for délégués du personnel (workplace representatives) and comités d'entreprise (works committees) as well as by certain nationwide elections. (One might be sceptical about the real significance of votes cast in the latter as any guide to a Confederation's 'strength', especially when workers are increasingly ignoring mots d'ordre, but they are useful as an indicator of how attractive a union's image - if not its detailed policy - is to the public).

Of particular note amongst these elections were those for social security administrative boards in



October 1983<sup>(3)</sup>. The CGT headed the union list with 28.19 percent, FO had 25.17 percent, the CFDT 18.38 percent, the CGC 15.93 percent and the CFTC 12.30 percent. Many observers noted that 'reformist' unions were now apparently in a majority position and Le Nouvel Observateur of 28th October 1983 wondered: 'Est-ce la fin du syndicalisme de contestation?'

However, one should bear in mind that FO has long played a very active role in these bodies, and that the electorate (some 29 million people) stretches well beyond the active workforce. A more reliable test of union influence among workers may be found in the elections for members of industrial tribunals (conseils de prud'hommes) involving all employees (employers are obliged by law to register them). In 1982, the CGT polled 36.8 percent (42.26 percent in the previous elections of 1979); CFDT 29.5 percent (23.21 percent); FO 17.78 percent (17.32 percent); CGC 9.64 percent (5.24 percent); and CFTC 8.46 percent (7.19 percent) (Figures for 1982 from Lefranc, 1984: 122; for 1979 from Landier, 1981: 88).

There is a clear decline in the CGT vote but in this instance, at least, it is mainly to the benefit of the CFDT.

Finally, a real indication of each Confederation's audience in offices and factories - and one measurable over a long period - is given by the elections for workplace committees, which are obligatory in companies of over fifty employees and can also be set up by

agreement in smaller enterprises. Elections are held every two years so the results for 1983 are best compared with those of 1981, 1982 with 1980, and so on (see Appendix One).

The decline in the CGT vote from over 50 percent in 1966 to just 28.5 percent in 1983 is remarkable. Over half the votes lost by the CGT during this period appear to have been 'transferred' to non-unionised candidates and these, for the first time in 1983, formed the second largest 'bloc' of representatives, ahead of the CFDT.

The success of such candidates is obviously something more than a local phenomenon: one might argue that it is both a facet of the lost hegemony of the CGT among the working class and an indicator of the disquiet workers feel at the divisiveness of the labour movement; on a broader plane, it may reflect the desire of workers to be represented by colleagues who may be more prepared to concentrate on local conditions than the union men who see problems through the prism of Confederation doctrine and policy.

Mouriaux (1983: 70) has argued:

Sans que l'adhésion soit envisagée, de nombreux salariés se reconnaissent dans les organisations représentatives. (B)

That remark should perhaps be qualified in view of the trend discussed above, especially in the context of a participation rate of just 69 percent in these

elections.

Both FO and the CFTC have moved ahead in the 1980s and the CFDT vote made steady progress<sup>(4)</sup> up until 1983. However, the figures underline the caution with which one should treat FO's claims that it is now the second largest Confederation. Some progress has been made in terms of its electoral audience but the real change may simply be at the level of its public exposure. With the CGT and the CFDT compromised by their association with an unpopular government, FO's notion of non-alignment has proved a rallying point for workers not only disillusioned by the 'Left experiment' but maybe actively threatened with the loss of their jobs. As the CGT was mostly quiescent till early 1984 and the CFDT tended to accept the need for (negotiated) restructuring which might entail job loss, or job displacement, FO may have looked attractive to those interested in redundancy payments or even fighting to save the jobs, irrespective of the economic arguments. To quote the UIMM report in Le Monde of 7th November 1985:

...à l'évidence, FO se développe dans les secteurs où le découragement et la résignation alimentent la tentation du repli corporatif... (C)

In terms of actual members, FO has made one spectacular breakthrough in the high profile education sector<sup>(5)</sup> (helped in no small part by Trotskyite

defectors from FEN - see Le Monde, 16th May 1984) and this has helped give substance to the notion of an overall advance when in fact the picture is quite patchy.

FO's power base remains the Fonction Publique (the civil service, hospitals, the postal service, etc). At its 1984 conference, it announced that 55 percent of its membership now worked in the private sector: however, a survey of delegates revealed that only 36.3 percent came from private companies, 51.62 percent were from the Fonction Publique and 12.07 percent were from nationalised industries. The largest FO Federation remains that of the Services Publics et Santé (Liaisons Sociales, Document W/210, 19th December 1984): although the government created 240,000 jobs in the public sector between 1981 and 1983 as part of its employment strategy (Machin and Wright, 1985: 76), further new expansion was not countenanced after the 1982 policy change. There is no evidence that FO is recruiting in sectors where unionism is traditionally weak nor in the newer 'sunrise' industries and its Federations in manufacturing industries are presumably losing members as fast as the CGT and CFDT given the overall picture of job losses. (The largest Federation in both the CGT and CFDT is that of the (combined) engineering and mining workers. Citing an internal CGT document, Libération of 12th February 1985 reported that membership of the CGT's Fédération des Travailleurs de la Métallurgie fell by around 21.5 percent between 1983 and 1984).

The CFTC's strongest group is its teachers' Federation with the miners in second place, almost the entire mining Federation having opted to join the CFTC in the 1964 split (Reynaud, 1975a: 109).

French Confederations are organised along both industrial and geographical lines and representatives from both these levels are present in their governing bodies.

The implantation of each Confederation at a regional level varies, naturally, according to the degree of industrialisation, but also according to the history of an area, its cultural and political associations. The CGT tends to be strongest in those areas which have been industrialised the longest - the Parisian area, Rhône-Alpes, the Nord... In areas which have a more conservative and (particularly) catholic tradition, such as Brittany, Lower Normandy and Alsace, the CFDT tends to be stronger (Mouriaux, 1982: 19). The CFTC is proportionately strong in these same areas but it is also well represented in the mining area of Nord-Pas-de-Calais for the historical reasons referred to above. FO is strongest in those areas with a socialist and lay tradition, notably in the north and south-west, but a change may be underway with FO now faring better in elections in areas which do not necessarily have a socialist character (Bergounioux, 1982: 54-6).

### The Concept of 'Union Power' in France

French unions are represented on various planning and industrial bodies as well as on the important social security boards (though these are more often than not run by coalitions of FO, CGC and management representatives).

However, any measurement of union power in France today must address their capacity to influence key economic decisions concerning employment - the issue of the 1980s. And in this instance, strength on the ground, in the workplace, is crucial.

A central aim of the Auroux laws of 1982 was, precisely, to build up union strength in the workplace in order that unions could bargain on a more equal footing with employers. Syndicats were only legally recognised in the workplace from 1969: before, and indeed after, a solid membership base in firms was not vital to the French notion of union 'power'. Unions gained their legitimacy from votes in elections and a large part of their resources came from various state and local council subsidies, not to mention the facilities provided (by law, for the most part) by employers (Adam, 1983).

The ambiguity of such legitimacy and the fragility of this model of unionism have been laid bare in the last decade as traditional allegiances have declined, employers have adapted their personnel policies and the unions have failed to address the needs of new 'communities' (as Segrestin (1981) has termed them: see

also Adam 1983; Landier 1981; Touraine et al, 1984; Morville, 1985).

The picture has emerged of a labour movement whose real power is latent. Unionisation varies a great deal by industry and region and much depends on the energy of activists in local syndicats. Their relationship to the potential supporter (see Adam et al, (1970) for the concept of the 'sympathisant épisodique') is crucial if latent power is to be translated into real strength at vital moments. Together with the highly ideological atmosphere, the hostility of employers to worker organisations and the related weakness of bargaining structures, this relationship helps to explain why industrial relations in France is characterised by phases of calm followed, as frustrations build up, by explosions which frequently lend an insurrectionary air to industrial disputes.

Kesselman (1983b: 291-2) has noted that such disputes always posed a potential threat to the highly centralised French state: Prefects responsible directly to the government had the power to intervene in local disputes and, faced as they usually were by intransigent employers, workers therefore saw political action as the best way to advance their interests especially as so much of industrial life is regulated anyway by government-enacted legislation. For Kesselman, the whole thrust of the Socialists' decentralisation and labour relations reforms after 1981 was designed to take the heat out of industrial conflict and institutionalise

relations at workplace level. Since these changes potentially affect not only the unions' ability to act on employment but the whole face of industrial relations in France, the Auroux laws will be examined in detail in Chapter 4. The next chapter examines some of the doctrinal issues which underpin the structural features of French unionism outlined here, with the emphasis put on recent developments.

#### NOTES

1. I am concerned with differentiating the main Confederations but alternative typologies have been attempted (eg by Durand et al in Sociologie du Travail, 2/68, 1968) in which categories of action and activists may be located in more than one Confederation.

2. Further details on the smaller Confederations and autonomous unions can be found in Reynaud, 1975a: 100 and 117; Rioux, 1972: 122-5; Adam, 1970; and Agnès, 1980).

3. These were the first elections since 1962, administrators having simply been designated by unions, employers and other bodies from 1967. In 1962, the CGT had 44.3 percent, the CFTC (shortly to become the CFDT) 20.97 percent, FO 14.73 percent and the CGC 4.65 percent.

4. Unspectacular, though, when set beside the claimed 50 percent rise in membership between the schism of 1964 and the mid-1970s.

5. In the important professional elections to



education committees in December 1984, FO scored 11.9 percent against 2.4 percent in 1982; FEN 58.5 percent (66); and SGEN-CFDT 14 percent (15.5).

#### TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

(A) 'It does not follow from the centralisation and stability of the union leadership that the Confederations are very powerful. They have a great moral authority but lack both the control and the financial means needed to govern in any authoritarian manner... They provide the activists with the overall view and the long term policies to guide action at local level and these are respected - but discipline is not strict.' (Reynaud, 1975a: 133).

(B) 'Without feeling any great desire to join, a great many employees identify with the main unions.' (Mouriaux, 1983: 70).

(C) 'The evidence shows that FO is making progress in those sectors where lack of fight and resignation underpin a temptation to fall back on purely self-centred issues.' (The UIMM, quoted in Le Monde, 7th November 1985).

## 2. THE TRADE UNION CONFEDERATIONS IN FRANCE

The French union movement can be broadly divided into two arms, one 'revolutionary' and one 'reformist', to use the designated terms (see especially Landier, 1980: Ch. 2).

The former is distinguished primarily by a desire to transform society (its projet de société): like the reformists, the revolutionary unions naturally defend the 'moral and material interests' of the workers but an attempt is always made to situate claims in the wider social, economic and political context and use grievances to raise class consciousness.

Distinct strategic choices follow from the ideological positions of both wings. The reformists are prepared to negotiate and sign agreements with employers: strikes are seen as a sometimes necessary last resort. For the revolutionaries, a strike has a value in itself (Reynaud, 1975a: 164) and the simple fact of mobilising workers is as important as any results gained. The strike is a symbol of working class unity and contributes to the rapports de force (the balance of power between unions and employers): this, rather than any argument used in negotiations, is what wrings concessions from the employer or state.

Before looking at the ideology and doctrine of each of the five main Confederations, it is necessary to rapidly run through the history of unionism in France in

order to provide the background to current ideological stances and divisions. (See Lefranc, 1984, 1951 and 1969 for classic histories).

#### A Brief History of Trade Unionism in France

The Le Chapelier law of June 1791 outlawed all combinations of working men (and employers) and while unions were officially tolerated from 1868 (probably because the government needed some way of controlling the growth in working men's associations (Lefranc, 1984: 10)), they were only formally legalised in 1884.

There was already a tendency to organise on both regional and occupational lines. This is important in that links between workers of different trades helped offset any concentration on narrow sectional aims and therefore provided a foundation for the class unionism which has remained a bedrock of the French labour movement (Kassalow, 1969: 114).

The CGT was constituted in 1895, made up of a variety of local, regional and national groupings; single trade unions; industrial federations; and the Fédération Nationale des Bourses du Travail, town-based organisms which provided support and educational services for syndicats. It was in the Bourses, too, that the idea of the general strike took root, the anarcho-syndicalist notion that unions and workers could seize power through their own industrial action without the need for political parties.

This aloofness from parties was enshrined in the CGT

statutes at the founding Limoges conference and the Amiens conference of 1906 confirmed and elaborated on this non-alignment, as outlined in the introduction.

The union was an autonomous social unit, independent of party, employer and the state. It should be stressed that even if the 'Amiens Charter' resulted from contemporary tactical manoeuvring (Mouriaux, 1982: 38-42), the notion of independence rapidly became a central tenet of French trade unionism.

Most modern observers (Gallie, 1983: 190-3; Lash, 1984: 213, for example) play down the importance of revolutionary syndicalism but certain of its features are still important today - the independence from parties, employers and the state, of course; but also the notion of the general strike as the ultimate sanction of working class power; and the idea of unionism as the work of 'minorités agissantes' (Lefranc, 1984: 33), conscious activists, inevitably a minority of the workforce, working away to raise the awareness of the masses and prompt them to action. Although the CGT in particular aspires to be a 'mass' organisation, the minority situation of French unions still sees activists filling this sort of role.

However, revolutionary syndicalism per se was all but laid to rest in 1914 when international proletarianism lay down before jingoist sentiment. During the Great War, unions moved closer to the state, often managing to extract considerable concessions in return for attempts (not always successful) to impose

calm on the industrial front.

At the end of the war, the circumspect attitude of CGT leaders Jouhaux (later to help found FO) and Merrheim seemed treacherous to some who had revolutionary ambitions and this minority broke away to form the CGT Unitaire in 1921.

In 1919, the CFTC was formed and 'pluralism' was henceforth a feature of French unionism. However, domestic and international events (the rise of fascism, the creation of the Popular Front, Stalin's acceptance of the French state's right to national defence) prompted a merger of the 'two CGT's' in 1936. The strike wave of that year (largely spontaneous in the wake of the Popular Front victory) ended with the success of several long-standing union demands (the recognition of representatives in firms - délégués du personnel - in particular) and the Blum government committed itself to introducing a legal 40 hour week and paid holidays. CGT membership rose by perhaps 150 percent to 2.5 million during the strike wave and the union claimed five million by the end of the year. (The CFTC claimed 500,000 at the end of 1936).

However, CGT membership had fallen back to a million by 1939 with internal divisions again hardening due to the political ambitions of the ex-Unitaires (close to the PCF), the failure of a 1938 strike against government economic policy and differing perceptions of the international political scene. The pro-communist elements were finally expelled in the wake of the

Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939 and were forced underground when the government pronounced the dissolution of all Communist-linked organisations.

After the French defeat, some unionists rallied to the Vichy government (strikes were outlawed and unions became little more than corporatist vehicles run on industrial lines) and others reluctantly opted for a politique de présence to fight for the workers within the restrictive context. Others, both former CGT and CFTC members moved underground and from April 1943 linked up with the pro-Communist unionists. These forces promoted both legal (under Vichy) activity and clandestine action. By their work in the Resistance (at least, after the Nazi invasion of Russia) the Communists and their supporters among the unionists won themselves a pre-eminent position among the working class.

Soon after the end of the war, the CFTC asserted its trade union credentials by cutting its links with the Christian Democrat MRP and dropping the specific reference to the pontifical encyclicals in its statutes. In 1944, it refused the merger suggested by the CGT and henceforth, while the latter claimed to be the only legitimate union for the working class and denounced union divisions, other Confederations argued for 'pluralism' as a vital element of labour movement democracy.

This pluralism was enlarged soon after the war, first by the founding of the Confédération Générale des Cadres, then by the schism which saw the emergence of FO

in 1947-8 in the wake of violent strikes called by the CGT to oppose French acceptance of Marshall Aid (and perhaps also aimed at restoring PCF ministers to the cabinet). At the same time, the Fédération de l'Education Nationale (FEN) also quit the CGT but, wishing to remain unified, opted for autonomy<sup>'1'</sup>.

FO consolidated itself<sup>'2'</sup>, its main areas of strength lying in the public sector and civil service (especially the post office - FO syndicats here took the lead in a 1953 strike wave).

The CGT, from supporting the reconstruction efforts of the post-war tripartite government, moved onto the offensive as worker discontent mounted in the difficult years of the late 1940s. Furthermore, the PCF was increasing its hold on the Confederation, the Communist leaders and activists still drawing dividends from their role in the Resistance. CGT leaders were allowed to occupy official positions in parties following a vote which modified the union rules in 1946 (Mouriaux, 1982: 90).

The Cold War years saw the CGT still incontestably in a majority position vis-à-vis the other Confederations but it was under repeated attack from the government for its 'subversive' activities. A strike in 1952 against the arrival of the US General Ridgeway was a failure, paving the way for heightened anti-CGT (and anti-PCF) repression: CGT General Secretary Benoit Frachon actually had to go into hiding in 1953 (Mouriaux, 1982: 98).

Between 1952 and 1960, the CGT was eliminated from its position on the committees of the Plan, state sector administrations, ILO delegations and European organisms and was effectively kept out of most negotiations between unions and employers from 1948 (Harmel, 1982: 40-1; Mouriaux, 1982: 191). In fact, it was the mediation of the CFDT which brought the CNPF (the employers' organisation) and the CGT back round the table in 1966 (Hamon and Rotman, 1982: 178).

The emergence of the CFDT was perhaps the most significant development in French unionism after the end of the Cold War period. It was born in 1964 from the 'deconfessionalised' CFTC (a Confederation basing its action on 'christian social morality' continuing under those initials) and was the culmination of a process begun some 20 years earlier by unionists looking to build a strong, democratic organisation, solidly on the Left, which could stand up to the CGT without being guided by any visceral anti-communism, as with FO.

Some elements in the old CFTC had actively sought a merger with FO and FEN (Hamon and Rotman, 1982) but both were suspicious of the CFTC's clerical origins and FO would not countenance any unified action with the CGT, a central aim of those who engineered the transition to the CFDT.

A 'unity in action' pact was eventually signed by the CFDT and CGT alone at the start of 1966 and some analysts (for example Dubois, 1984) have pointed to this as an important factor in the resurgence of strike



activity in the late 1960s and indeed the May 1968 explosion. However, as in 1936, the strike wave of this period rather took the unions by surprise and if the CFDT generally supported 'new' qualitative demands and tried to use the favourable rapports de force to gain structural changes such as the legal recognition of unions in the workplace, the CGT seemed more intent on fixing demands within traditional limits and preventing the workers from being 'contaminated' by gauchistes on its left.

At its 1970 conference the CFDT formally embraced socialism though the emphasis on autogestion (worker self-management) and democratic planning set it apart from the more centralist CGT approach.

It grew rapidly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, overtaking FO as second largest Confederation.

The mid-1970s were dominated by political developments, in particular the Common Programme for government adopted by the PS and PCF in 1972 and endorsed enthusiastically by the CGT, the CFDT remaining aloof though broadly sympathetic to the Union de la Gauche. (The other Confederations remained theoretically non-aligned though links with parties on the Right have been alleged in some cases).

The collapse of Left unity and the resulting failure at the 1978 elections prompted elements within both the CFDT and the CGT to reconsider their strategy and alliances, a reappraisal made urgent by the economic problems which beset the western world from 1973-4.

## Trade Union Doctrine in France

Having situated the Confederations historically, it is necessary to examine the doctrines of each. The treatment of the subject here is not comprehensive: the aim is to differentiate each Confederation and further highlight French 'specificities' and particular attention is paid to aspects of doctrine which affect the core concerns of this thesis.

The CGT embodies a Marxist conception of unionism (Mouriaux, 1982: 126) and sees itself as a class-based, mass organisation. According to the first article of its rule book, the CGT organises workers irrespective of political, religious or philosophical opinions in order to defend their 'moral and material, economic and occupational' interests. That classic formula may also be said to apply to the rest of the French labour movement. However, beyond that:

...la CGT s'assigne pour but la  
suppression de l'exploitation capitaliste,  
notamment par la socialisation des moyens de  
production et d'échange. (A)

The CGT sees its task as relating to both immediate and long term interests and the latter entail the elimination of a form of social organisation which systematically exploits the workers.

As outlined above, historically (and theoretically still today) the French labour movement has considered itself capable alone of overthrowing the capitalist system and, indeed, organising production and distribution in the new society. This is an important aspect of its avowed non-alignment.

However, Landier (1981: 175-9) argues that nowadays the CGT merely pays lip service to the notion of independence enshrined in the Amiens Charter and that the union is no more than a relay of PCF policy. For Harmel (1982: 18-29), too, the CGT is the Leninist mass organisation par excellence, the 'transmission belt' for the Communist vanguard '3'.

Other analysts are less dogmatic. Mouriaux (1982: 202-3) follows Lavau in his opinion that the CGT and the PCF share the same 'ecosystem':

Nés du grand schisme qui a traversé le mouvement ouvrier après la Première Guerre mondiale, partageant le même souci d'assurer à la classe ouvrière une expression indépendante et unie, puisant dans le même vivier humain, les deux organisations ont une histoire solidaire. S'il est polémique et réducteur de présenter la branche syndicale comme un simple relais de l'avant-garde politique, il est apologétique et abstrait de proclamer, sans plus de commentaire, son indépendance. (B)

Mouriaux notes that CGT and PCF sections may coexist uneasily in some larger firms<sup>(4)</sup> and that exchanges at any level (workplace, regional, national) between party and union are never unidirectional.

Furthermore (and especially in the period of most concern to us) 'transmission belt' theorists tend to posit both union and party as homogeneous blocs when in reality differences of opinion and even tendencies can exist within each<sup>(5)</sup>. It seems likely that Communists within the CGT were urging PCF Ministers to quit the Mauroy government long before June 1984 because of rising discontent among members with policies which restricted wage rises and hit employment.

Ross (1982) feels that CGT-PCF links vary, depending on the period, between straight 'transmission beltism' (as in the Cold War years) and what he terms 'relative autonomy', by which he means that the union concentrates on trade union action proper but still takes the options within the union sphere of activity which best reflect the Party's goals.

In fact, the term 'devolved authority' used by Morris (1983) may be more appropriate since the 'autonomy' can always be revoked by the Party.

It is clear that only a minority of CGT members can also be in the PCF. However, PCF members are prominent in the ruling bodies of the union. Following what is by now a tradition, the Bureau Confédéral elected at the 42nd conference in November 1985 comprised nine PCF

members and nine others. The executive commission elected by conference comprised of 76 percent PCF members (Le Monde, 1st-2nd December 1985). According to Landier (1981: 178), the Comité Confédéral National, the next highest body which meets twice a year and which is composed of the secretaries of the geographical Unions and industrial federations was close to being 100 percent Communist. The PCF thus has a solid presence at all the major decision-making levels and if the exact nature of union-party interchanges is uncertain, the party's input can only be considered substantial<sup>(8)</sup>.

This inevitably causes problems and whenever the CGT's stands have been too partisan (the 1950s, the late 1970s, 1984 onwards) it has alienated part of its membership. On occasions the distinction between defending the workers' interests and following the policy options of the PCF may be hard to define. At other times - the 1950s agitation for peace and against US imperialism, for example - the connection between the workers' situation and their union's policies is less clear.

However, the CGT sees part of its function as the raising of class consciousness and political strikes are called to that end. Furthermore, strikes are held to be important in themselves, as explained above. Solidarity is demonstrated, and issues are given a generality which kindles opposition to the very system which throws up disputes. The CGT in this way builds up those variables of class consciousness isolated by Touraine (1966):

identity (with members of one's own class); opposition (to capitalism); totality (of this opposition); which helps the formation of the image of an alternative society.

The typical CGT tactic, especially during the 1970s, was to push local grievances onto a national stage and funnel discontent into 'days of action' when 24 hour work stoppages would be marked by demonstrations in Paris and provincial centres. More often than not, this form of action is aimed at the government, even if the stated aim is not to overthrow it.

Dubois et al (1978: 67-8) emphasise the political import of strikes in France and their words are especially applicable to the CGT:

...the proportion of strikes with a political significance is considerable: something like one strike in two has, for those militants who led it, a direct political significance or provides a necessary hardening of attitudes towards the establishment.

The symbolic aspect of its activity shows through, too, in the CGT attitude towards negotiations. The CGT is not a great signer of agreements - negotiations are just as much about presenting class positions as bargaining '7' and the idea of fixed term agreements on either the US or even the UK model is anathema to the

Confederation:

Assurément, ni la CFDT ni la CGT ne sont prêtes à accepter des clauses de 'paix sociale'; elles affirment même explicitement qu'un accord constate une situation et que sa validité disparaît quand la situation change.

(Reynaud, 1975a: 183) (C)

Until recently the CGT has been reluctant to get involved in 'qualitative' issues, preferring to concentrate on matters such as wages, job guarantees and pension schemes where the interests of worker and employer are both clear and to a large extent antagonistic. This is the result of its class conception of unionism: the CGT is wary of tackling subjects which might implicate it in any way in the workings of capitalist structures.

However, as will be detailed later, economic and political factors have recently obliged the CGT to adopt a more offensive stance, especially when it comes to the proposal of counter-plans in firms undergoing restructuring.

One might also compare the changing attitude of the CGT to the Plan since its inception (Mouriaux, 1982: 182-3).

Force Ouvrière, as we have seen, was born from a schism in the CGT at the end of 1947 and has always

considered itself the continuation of the 'old' CGT - before the 'Communist takeover' - and the embodiment of the principle of non-alignment<sup>'8'</sup>. It allows itself to comment on political developments and government orientations but does not attempt to influence them unless labour interests are directly involved<sup>'9'</sup>.

It should be emphasised that despite the retention in the statutes of the old CGT objective of the 'disappearance of the (distinction between) employers and workers', FO nowadays describes itself as a reformist organisation and its selective reading of the Amiens Charter reflects this. The employer is undoubtedly the enemy and strength is required to extract concessions: but any revolutionary perspective is missing, perhaps because, for FO, the classless society is a myth and an independent trade union will always be necessary. Bergounioux, (1982: 67-8) describes FO as the latest repository of the old French labour tradition of proudhonism: there will always be conflict in society and therefore a counterweight is needed to offset the power of employers and the state<sup>'10'</sup>.

Thus, in the article Contrepoids ou Contre-pouvoir in the special issue of FO Hebdo, 1608, 21st November 1979, the idea of the union as an 'alternative power' is deemed dangerous since, if it succeeds, no 'counterweight' will be left to defend those still called upon to labour. In 1906, the Amiens Charter saw the union as the vehicle to manage the workshop and run



the wider economy. FO refuses any such role.

However, FO is not entirely faithful to even a reformist reading of Amiens. Léon Jouhaux, founding spirit of FO, had pushed the CGT in a reformist direction in the inter-war years and advocated a union presence in state bodies which he saw as a legitimate way of representing workers' interests at the highest level. FO now refuses all but a consultative role. Bergounioux (1982: 69) argues that in its search for doctrinal solidity, vital to withstand CGT pressure in the post-war years, it has banked all on its 'neutrality' and independence: the economic and political arena are strictly differentiated and real union intervention is only countenanced in the former<sup>(11)</sup>.

In the workplace, as in state committees, FO makes the workers' views known and demands information: it accepts a 'checking' role (contrôle in French) but rejects any input into management (gestion).

The notion of the union as a counterweight leads FO to espouse collective agreements as the surest way to advance workers' interests. Nonetheless, FO's concept of negotiation is still idiosyncratic from an Anglo-Saxon perspective and if it signs more readily than the CGT, it shares the latter's notion of acquis - gains made in one set of negotiations are sacrosanct and not to be bargained away in another - and agreements are not necessarily seen as binding.

It is misleading to dismiss FO as a 'professional

contract signer' as Lange et al do (1982: 87), all the more so since FO is even more heterogeneous at syndicat level than the other Confederations. It includes old-style (SFIO) Socialists, revolutionary syndicalists, Gaullists - systematic RPR infiltration has been alleged, especially since 1981 - and Trotskyites: all shades of opinion are present<sup>12</sup> and this is perhaps a major reason why FO policies seem so unadventurous (which in turn explains why analysts can justifiably talk of the 'remarkable stability' of such a potentially volatile organisation (cf. Rioux, 1972: 87)): in order to avoid provoking the opposition of such and such a political tendency, FO has built a body of doctrine around the notion of 'neutrality' and uses this to reduce its official stance on most issues to a sort of 'lowest common denominator' which all sides can relate to:

...trop de ses positions sont encore exprimées négativement... Les contraintes qu'imposent sa diversité interne engagent nécessairement Force Ouvrière à la prudence (Bergounioux, 1982: 126). (D)

Rival Confederations sometimes accuse FO syndicats of being 'house unions' and management may occasionally have had a hand in setting them up to offset CGT influence. However, FO's unionism is generally not tepid. It will strike when it feels the necessity

(though it refuses all appeals for common action with the CGT at national level) and its rhetoric can be just as violent as that of its rivals. It is scathing towards the 'communism' of the CGT and the intellectual pretensions of the CFDT. If its reformist practice takes it close to the CGC and the CFTC, its class basis and refusal of any management role leaves it some distance from the former and its fundamental anti-clericalism makes it an uneasy partner for the latter (and indeed the CFDT, still tainted by its confessional origins...).

In one fundamental respect the CFDT provides a direct contrast to FO: whereas the latter shuns the political field, the CFDT actively embraces it, seeing a legitimate role for a Left union either autonomously or as the equal partner of the political parties of the Left.

The CFTC's metamorphosis was no overnight phenomenon but the patient work of activists impelled by various forces - experience of the Resistance; changes in the Catholic church and the related growth in activist organisations such as the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne; the desire to see a democratic force on the Left capable of challenging the hegemony of the PCF and the CGT; the radicalising effect of anti-imperialist struggles in Indochina, Algeria and elsewhere, and so on (Hamon and Rotman, 1982).

The central aspects of CFDT doctrine are hard to pin down, partly because of ambiguity, partly because they

are in flux, more than ever so today.

Even as the CFTC it was in favour of 'democratic planning' (Reynaud, 1975a: 268-71; and CFDT, 1971) though it gradually became more and more disillusioned with the procedures and results of the state planning apparatus. The desire of some CFDT leaders (including current General Secretary Edmond Maire) and PSU<sup>(13)</sup> members to propose a 'counter-plan'<sup>(14)</sup> to the official Fifth Plan caused ructions at the 1965 conference:

...on les accusait d'entériner les lois  
d'un système qu'il faudrait abattre. (Hamon  
and Rotman, 1982: 171). (E)

That debate is still alive today as internal opposition to the current 'modernist' line shows (Raybould, 1985a).

The CFDT embraced the spirit of May 1968 more readily than the other Confederations, especially the cultural and liberatarian aspects; but it also took advantage of the rapports de force established at the time to push for the legal recognition of union sections in the workplace which was enshrined in a December 1968 law. The May events reinforced the anti-productivist and anti-statist aspects of CFDT thought which lay behind its scepticism over the Common Programme.

Following 1968, gauchiste elements found a home in the radicalised CFDT but the leadership, concerned about undesirable external influences, proceeded to a purge in some of the more turbulent local unions (Mouriaux, 1984:

98). The Annecy Congress of 1976 confirmed the leadership line, described by Hamon and Rotman (1982: 284) as an attempt to dissociate (acceptable) 'cultural leftism' from 'political leftism' (unacceptable, particularly given the French concept of union non-alignment).

The militants who engineered the change from the CFTC to the CFDT were firmly on the Left (though - another idiosyncrasy in the French context - they were more influenced by UK Labour theorists such as Richard Crossman than Marx - see Hamon and Rotman, 1982: 92-3) but socialism was only formally embraced by the Confederation at its 1970 conference which voted for the three 'pillars' of CFDT action - democratic planning, the socialisation of the means of production and autogestion. The latter, which translates as 'worker self-management', was seen as both an end and the means: the proposers of the motion (including Edmond Maire) argued that social transformation did not slot neatly into the revolutionary phases of the conquest of power, the transition to socialism, then socialism itself.

This concept was not unopposed: one current argued that democratic planning and autogestion were only possible after the 'collective appropriation' of capital; another that the electoral road to change was not the only one and that union action ought not to be bound by 'legalism'...

Similar arguments continued (and continue) to rage within the Confederation. Thus, at the Annecy

conference, even if the delegates re-elected Maire en masse and helped him defeat the gauchistes, several 'oppositionists' were voted into leading positions. Debate centred on the instruments of transition and what was feasible in any transitional stage. The Left opposition argued that any Left government in 1978 should not hold back on a radical break with capitalism (which led this group to work closely with the CERES tendency in the PS). Maire argued that the union could not be the agent of a political programme and should not be content to let its members become the 'assistés de la gauche au pouvoir', that is, over-reliant on gifts from a friendly government.

Shortly before, the CFDT had been a prime mover in the Assises du Socialisme (whose proceedings were published in 1974). The results proved disappointing to the unionists but the Confederation broadly remained close to the new PS. This entailed a revision rather than a rejection of the concept of non-alignment. It is useful here to sketch the debate which has exercised the CFDT from around 1967, ranging the advocates of the 'stratégie commune' against those of the 'stratégie autonome' (Hamon and Rotman, 1982: 166-77) (15).

Edmond Maire was the prime mover of the 'stratégie commune' which envisaged a strong union drawing up its own political programme and stimulating its political allies (that is, the non-Communist Left) with its proposals. The relationship would be one of complementarity,

...ce qui induisait en retour une pluralité de fonctions, la reconnaissance par les politiques du syndicalisme comme agent spécifique de la transformation sociale.

(Maire, interviewed in Hamon and Rotman, 1982: 172). (F)

The union would agree on 'objectives for government' - not quantitative demands but structural reforms. There would be a moral commitment but no 'no strike' deal. The workers had to understand that even with a Left government, there was a limit to what could be achieved: in return for 'economic responsibility', 'realism', the government would agree on a hierarchy of demands to be granted as and when possible.

Against this, advocates of the 'stratégie autonome' held a more traditional view. The union represents 'les gouvernés pas les gouvernants' (a phrase heard frequently from FO activists): it reacts to government options and should not be drawing up lists from which the government can then choose. The union's independence is not to be compromised in this way.

The alternative strategy is seen as a 'head office' phenomenon, 'un syndicalisme d'état-major'. Further, 'ce qui est rationnel économiquement n'est pas toujours raisonnable socialement'. From this perspective, the strike is the best method of advancing - pushing employers as far as they can go. Negotiations à chaud

(in the heat of the moment) are preferable by far to clinical agreements drawn up with potential governments. This is the traditional French unionism - militant, non-aligned, in permanent opposition and never likely to be tainted by the failure of a 'friendly' government.

This was the argument which won out in the mid-1960s - hence the 'unity in action' pact with the CGT which was intended to reconstruct a balance of power favourable to the workers. The subsequent jump in industrial action, May 1968 and (amongst other things) the achievement of a 35 percent rise in the minimum wage which clearly failed to cause any collapse of the economy seemed to bear out the arguments of the 'stratégie autonome' advocates.

However, subsequent developments (the recession, the collapse of the Union de la Gauche) led Maire to reopen the debate.

Feeling certain that the Right would be re-elected in 1978 and hold onto power for a considerable period, Maire and others felt the need to 'recentre' their union's action: it had been drawn by the CGT into too many 'days of action' which were primarily political and ultimately sterile. It was necessary to refocus union activity, aim for advances closer to the ground through negotiation. The emphasis was to be on realistic, realisable demands: to that end, secret meetings were held with employers' leaders and government officials at the end of 1977 to see what they might be prepared to bargain over. In this context, Maire's request to meet



Giscard two days after the Right's victory in 1978 does not seem quite the dramatic event it appeared at the time (Hamon and Rotman, 1982: 298-311).

Recentrage thus posited the feasibility of working class gains without prior political change, through negotiating in good faith - a significant and controversial change in orientation compared with the post-1968 period, but perhaps an aspect of CFDT continuity, too, since the Confederation had always sought to get reluctant employers round the negotiating table (Mouriaux, 1984a).

Henceforth, union action would focus more directly on the workplace but there would be no integration of workers, and strikes to achieve demands - job creation via a shorter working week, better conditions, an extension of worker and trade union rights - would not be disavowed. Even limited openings from employers should be followed up. The Moreau Report on recentrage (resyndicalisation has subsequently been preferred) was finally accepted by the Conseil National in April 1978 (See Syndicalisme Hebdo, No. 1703, 4th May 1978).

The directions sketched out by this report have been followed and the implications taken even further, despite a tendency to expect everything from the Socialist government in 1981, and nowadays it is debatable whether the CFDT belongs in the 'revolutionary' camp. It is still socialist in orientation but its anti-capitalism is compromised in the eyes of both internal and external critics by its

pragmatic approach to negotiations and alliances (Raybould, 1985a). Maire nowadays pleads for 'un anti-capitalisme sans simplisme', arguing that the worst excesses of capitalism have been curbed by union action and the law, 'l'action quotidienne de transformation' (Le Monde, 5th March 1986), which would appear to be a classic statement of reformism.

The CFDT retains an evident affinity with sections of the PS and broadly supported the Mauroy/Fabius 'modernisation' programme despite some bitterness at the lack of real consultation. Many cédétistes were appointed to official positions or the back-up staff of Ministers<sup>'16'</sup> which left the Confederation open to criticism from its union rivals and the wider workforce when government policy became unpopular.

In late 1985, confirming the line implicit at the Bordeaux conference that summer, Maire declared that the Confederation would not be calling for a Left vote in the 1986 elections - the first time the Confederation had declined to make such a recommendation since 1970. Henceforth, recentrée, the CFDT would talk to all parties - there were to be no more taboos<sup>'17'</sup>...

In one respect, this seemed to be a reaffirmation of the union's right to a say in the political field but for many activists it was a rejection of a tradition stretching back to 1964 and beyond<sup>'18'</sup>.

From its origins, the CFTC was a christian not a catholic organisation<sup>'19'</sup>: even if it was inspired by

the Encyclical Rerum Novarum of 1891, the principles of justice and christian charity were not interpreted in any dogmatic fashion (Lefranc, 1984: 49). Collaboration was the key-word, along with the desire to see a just distribution of the profits of labour. Class antagonism is seen as a fact and deplored as such: ... but it is not inherent in the system and can be eradicated through the correct application of union strength and if the moral principles of christianity are diffused throughout society (Reynaud, 1975a: 86-8).

The CFTC eliminated all reference to the Encyclicals from its statutes in 1947 but the reference to the 'morale sociale chrétienne' remains<sup>(20)</sup>. Around the same time, the CFTC's independence from the MRP was affirmed and formal links between union and party severed. This, together with the rejection of catholic doctrine, was largely the work of men who were later instrumental in the 'deconfessionalisation' but the present day CFTC was nonetheless shaped by this period and the Resistance which preceded it (Hamon and Rotman, 1982: 17-39).

The CFTC envisages a partnership of mutual respect between the owner of the means of production and the worker who has certain rights, notably the right to a just remuneration 'pour assurer la dignité de l'homme et de sa famille' (CFTC, undated: 18). CFTC documents and discourse are sprinkled with similar references to the nuclear family and areas such as education and the welfare system are prominent among its preoccupations. (The Confederation was active in the successful campaign

to head off any reorganisation of the private - mainly Catholic - school sector by the Socialist government in 1983-4).

It argues for free enterprise, adding that ownership carries certain responsibilities - the duty to provide jobs and incomes, for example. The state sector should be limited to the provision of certain services and action to safeguard rights and common goods.

The CFTC chooses (naturally, given its view of the potential for harmonious relationships in industry) to pursue the workers' interests by negotiation and contracts, the perfect instruments for 'la confrontation de points de vue différents mais non irrémédiablement contradictoires' (Landier, 1975: 71). Strikes are not rejected but the essentially political weapon of the general strike is (Reynaud, 1975a: 90).

The Confederation is resolutely reformist. Accepting the present system and seeking only to infuse more justice and mutual respect, the CFTC prides itself on its role in negotiating agreements on training, pensions, the improvement of working conditions and so on. For the CFTC, these justify the action of those:

qui ont tenu à faire passer l'intérêt immédiat des travailleurs avant les options idéologiques et les considérations de tactique. Les transformations se font en marchant, non dans l'attente d'une aggravation de la situation en vue d'hypothétiques bouleversements. (Landier, 1975: 74) (G)

Clearly, then, the CFTC is hostile to the class unionism of the CGT but it does not reject unified action with the latter for 'legitimate ends' (CFTC, undated: 36). In this respect, it is far more flexible than FO; and despite a shared reformism, relations with the latter are characterised by a certain formality because of FO's historical roots and anti-clericalism. Contacts with the CFDT are friendlier since the dispute over property and the CFTC name was settled in 1971.

CFTC doctrine has shown little change over the last twenty years. It has long espoused a supple form of planning (it first drew up a 'Plan' in 1935) and has been an advocate of incomes policies since 1961; since 1971 it has called for a simultaneous moderation of price and income rises but holds out for free collective bargaining within a contractual framework (Conference Report, 1984: 83).

It works for a 'real community of interests' in the workplace and has advocated industrial relations reforms to this end - obligatory mediation in conflicts, more profit-sharing, workers on boards, to name a few (see Landier, 1975: 109-28). However, its reaction to the Auroux laws was reserved, perhaps because the CFTC is not well implanted in many firms and other Confederations stood to gain more from the greater resources made available under the law.

The CGC, now known officially as the Confédération Générale de l'Encadrement CGC, recruits cadres, that is,

managers, but also foremen, technicians, representatives, engineers and selected white collar workers. Like all French Confederations, it proclaims its political independence: however, for the 1986 elections, it considered calling on its members to withdraw votes from candidates not supporting its social and economic positions and actively encouraged members to stand for seats, for any party other than the PCF, to ensure a voice for cadres in parliament (CGC, 1984: 29). Its social composition anchors it to the Right<sup>(21)</sup>, though Confederal pronouncements are less dogmatic since Paul Marchelli took over the leadership in 1984.

Like the CFTC, it rejects class struggle and calls for 'solidarity' based on a humanist vision of the world (CGC, undated: 5). In words which echo those of the CFTC, it advocates reformism -

... un syndicalisme du possible, un syndicalisme d'efforts constants, concrets et obstinés dans la direction souhaitable, infiniment plus efficace et plus générateur de progrès que des attitudes dogmatiques éloignées de la réalité et nourries d'une volonté révolutionnaire (CGC, undated: 6). (H)

Three major themes stand out among CGC preoccupations: the maintenance or even widening of salary differentials; pension arrangements and the social security system; the tax system (Reynaud, 1975a:

121). (Salaried managers on a high salary are hit harder than most and do not have the opportunities for evasion open to other high earners...).

Its relations with the CFTC are cordial ('une organisation syndicale pleine de bon sens' - CGC, 1984: 34) and it finds some common ground in negotiations with FO while broadly rejecting its outmoded 'syndicalisme de feuille de paie'.

But it is ideologically hostile to the CGT (even if the latter comes close in its defence of wage differentials - Landier, 1981: 263) and to the CFDT, the latter's recent evolution not entirely dispelling worries associated with its 1970s gauchisme, not to mention its autogestionnaire ideals and its calls for much flatter salary structures.

It is hostile to the attempts of the other Confederations to organise managers: it feels cadres have specific problems which cannot be handled by a general union, a majority of whose members will inevitably have interests quite opposed in certain respects - authority and salary differentials being the most obvious. It was affronted by the 'representative' status afforded the other Confederations' cadre groupings by the Socialist government in 1981.

Formerly, the CGC saw itself as something of a link between the antagonistic worlds of the employers and workers. More recently, however, under Marchelli, it has adopted a more strictly trade union profile<sup>(22)</sup>. Benguigui and Monjardet (1984) argue that the CGC has no

real 'project' and that it is more akin to a pressure group than a social movement. Nonetheless, they do note some evolution, the result, according to them, of the economic recession but also a function of the internal heterogeneity of the Confederation. Important elements actually left for a time in the 1960s and 1970s because of the Confederation's rapport with employers and its conservative preoccupations: the arrival of Marchelli from the Metalworkers' Federation heralded a more rigorous defence of the cadres as workers and a more hostile attitude to the government.

One might add that the growth of the cadres unions in the other Confederations has also spurred a more militant attitude among CGC members at plant level (as with their reaction to the Creusot-Loire dismantlement and the problems at Technip in 1984-5).

At its 1984 conference, the CGC called for a loosening of the state hold on industry and particularly on the financial and banking groups: the aim ought to be an 'économie concertée, régulée par une planification souple à la française' (CGC, 1984: 15). The riqueur of Delors was accepted but what the CGC saw as the lack of any coherent industrial redeployment programme was deplored. Given what it sees as its pivotal role in the workplace, the CGC was concerned about many aspects of the Auroux Report but the actual legislation proved more acceptable.

As will be outlined, the CGC embraces a form of 'proposition force unionism' and, given its membership,



sees itself as ideally placed to mediate between the economic objectives of companies and the social needs of the workers and the wider community.

#### NOTES

1. FO began to campaign hard in the education sector in 1983. At its 1984 conference, its leader André Bergeron stated, contrary to received opinion, that FO had never, tacitly or otherwise, agreed to abstain in this sector.

2. With funds from the US labour movement and possibly the US government, as well as money from the French (Socialist) Labour Minister (Bergounioux, 1975: 92; Kendall, 1975: 58; and Le Monde, 9th-12th May 1967). US money was still coming to FO in 1985 (Libération, 27th November 1985; International Labour Reports, 13, January 1986).

3. The 'transmission belt' union 'delivers' its members to a political party, letting political considerations guide industrial action.

4. The leader of the PCF cellule at Renault, Daniel Lacroix, was replaced on the PCF central committee by the leader of the CGT section in the company, Jean-Louis Fournier, when 'dissidents' were purged at the February 1985 Party Conference (Le Monde, 12th February 1985).

5. Hence the resignations of Jean-Louis Moynot and Christiane Gilles (formerly editor of the CGT's women's magazine, Antoinette), from the Bureau Confédéral in late 1981. Both were members of the PCF.

6. Semi-official talks between the CGT and PS in 1981 aimed at getting more Socialists into the union's ruling bodies had little tangible effect. (See Adam, 1983: 27).

7. A de facto division of labour has been established with the CGT (and the CFDT in the past) taking action to force concessions and FO stepping in to sign agreements to ensure these advances are not forefeited (Reynaud, 1975a: 186).

8. The general doctrine of FO is set out in a series of articles collected in a special supplement to the Confederation journal, FO Hebdo, 1608, 21st November 1979.

However, any attempt to classify FO is fraught with difficulties: the various Federations have more autonomy than their counterparts in the other Confederations and different aspects of doctrine are emphasised in each (Adam, 1983: 11; Moss, 1984).

9. A visceral anti-communism - shared by FO's old-style Socialists, anarcho-syndicalists and Trotskyites as well as its Right wing - is ever-present and causes strains. Ironically, Bergeron's public disapproval of the inclusion of four PCF members in the first Mauroy government in 1981 was criticised by some FO members on the grounds that this was a strictly political question that a trade union had no right to intervene in.

10. And the church. FO has a strong anti-clerical tradition (Remond, 1985: 307-8) though it rejected

accusations that it indulged in any 'chasse aux curés' at its 1984 conference (FO, 1985: 230).

11. However, Adam (1983) notes that FO activists became conseillers d'état in 1979.

12. Activists from other Confederations can be scornful about this variety and lack of consistency. One described FO to me as an 'auberge espagnole'. Another remarked: 'Vous rencontrez tout et n'importe quoi à Force Ouvrière!' ('You find anything and everything in FO!').

13. The Parti Socialiste Unifié still exists and was in the 1981 government coalition. It was an important element in the theoretical debates surrounding Socialist realignment in the 1960s and 1970s.

14. Pierre Le Brun and Maurice Labi, heretics from the CGT and FO respectively, were also involved (Le Matin, 12th June 1985).

15. See also the interesting article by Pierre Cours-Salies in Le Matin, 12th June 1985: 'C'est dans les vieilles marmites qu'on fait les meilleurs débats'. Published during the 1985 CFDT conference, it shows the relevance of the questions asked at the 1964 founding of the CFDT to the current debate within the Confederation.

16. See Hamon and Rotman (1982: 341-6) for the extent of this CFDT influence. Among the better known names, Hubert Prévost became head of the Plan; Jeanette Laot joined the Presidential staff with responsibility for women's affairs; Michel Rolant was appointed to an organisation concerned with energy conservation.

Metalworkers' leader Jacques Chérèque became special commissioner for Lorraine in May 1984.

17. Cf. the important CFTD report: 'Le Monde Change, Changeons Notre Syndicalisme' in Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2020-3 and 2025, 7th-28th June and 12th July 1984.

18. This overview has given something of the richness of the intellectual and doctrinal debate within the CFTC/CFTD. Excellent accounts are given in Hamon and Rotman (1982) and Mouriaux (1984a). See also the other contributions in Kesselman and Groux (1984) and Landier (1981).

19. Though a CFTC document, La Morale Sociale Chrétienne (undated: 12), claims: 'Ce sont les chrétiens en général et les catholiques en particulier qui ont le plus approfondi les données primitives contenues ... au plus profond de la conscience des hommes.'

20. Intégristes, or fundamentalists, still push for a more committed Christian interpretation of unionism. The building trades Federation was dissolved and reconstituted at the Marseilles conference in 1984 because of a dispute involving intégristes. (See Libération, 30th November 1984).

21. Mouriaux (1984b: 18) notes that Jacques Chirac urged his RPR militants to be active in the CGC.

22. The old mentality was common amongst CGC activists I met. One remarked: 'Si je suis militant CGC, c'est pour véhiculer une certaine conception de l'entreprise et de l'encadrement. Tout comme à la CGT on véhicule une certaine conception de la société.' (CGC,

Renault).

#### TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

(A) '... the CGT works for an end to capitalist exploitation, notably by the socialisation of the means of production and exchange.' (CGT Rule Book).

(B) 'The two organisations have come through history together: both emerged from the great schism in the working class movement after the first world war; they share the same concern to give that class a unified, independent voice; and they draw their recruits from the same sections of the population. It is reductionist and polemical to argue that the union arm is simply a relay of the political avant-garde; but it is also apologetic and abstract to proclaim its independence without further commentary.' (Mouriaux, 1982: 203).

(C) 'To be sure, neither the CFDT nor the CGT are about to accept 'no strike' clauses in any contract; in fact, they state explicitly that an agreement confirms a particular situation and its validity disappears when that situation changes.' (Reynaud, 1975a: 183).

(D) '... too many of its positions are still expressed in a negative fashion... The constraints imposed by its internal diversity necessarily require a certain prudence.' (Bergounioux, 1982: 26).

(E) '... they were accused of sanctioning the laws of a system they ought to be destroying.' (Hamon and Rotman, 1982: 171).

(F) '... which would lead, in return, to a plurality of functions, the recognition by the politicians of the trade union as a specific agent of social transformation.' (Hamon and Rotman, 1982: 172).

(G) '... those who have given priority to the immediate interests of the workers rather than ideological options and tactical considerations. Transformation comes by moving forward, not by waiting for a situation to deteriorate into some hypothetical upheaval.' (Landier, 1975: 74).

(H) '... a trade unionism of the possible, of constant, concrete, single-minded effort to move in the desired direction, which is infinitely more efficient and progressive than dogmatic attitudes with no grasp on reality and nourished by revolutionary ambitions.' (CGC, undated: 6).

### 3. THE FRENCH INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS SYSTEM

A central feature of the first two years of the Mitterrand Presidency was the passing of a series of laws in the field of industrial relations. The Lois Auroux (so designated after the name of the then Labour Minister) entailed the rewriting of a third of the labour legislation contained in the Code du Travail. In order to understand the aims, effects and potential long term impact of these laws on the place of trade unions in French society, it is necessary to set them in context. This chapter therefore describes the salient features of the French industrial relations system prior to the Auroux laws, concentrating on the attitudes of the 'social partners' (as the two sides of industry are so inappropriately called in France) to collective bargaining.

The reference to an industrial relations 'system' does not imply a functionalist approach. Indeed, the case of France could be used to discredit the 'system' concept, especially when it is used to suggest a natural tendency to stability and order. Dunlop, who first theorised the idea of an industrial relations system, wrote (1958: 383):

An industrial relations system creates an ideology or a commonly shared body of ideas

and beliefs regarding the interaction and role of the actors which helps to bind the system together.

Clearly, a majority in the French labour movement explicitly rejects any notion of sharing common beliefs with the employers. The revolutionary wing of French unionism actively combats capitalism and this is reflected in the confrontational way in which it uses industrial relations institutions.

A 'network of rules' (Dunlop, 1958) or a 'system of rules' (Flanders, 1965) does exist in France but it is inappropriate to place these at the centre of any industrial relations study: such an approach necessarily leads one to concentrate on how conflict in industry is managed or defused and neglects the structures of ownership or control which generate conflict (Hyman, 1975: 11). This is inadequate when consensus on social institutions is lacking and trade unions actively mobilise to overturn these structures of control. In short, it is difficult in the French context to view conflict as somehow useful (in that it allows 'friction' in the system to be located and eliminated) when that conflict is always a potential threat to the very existence of the system.

Similarly, where bargaining does not occupy the central place that it does in, say, the UK or US, it cannot be seen as the great determinant of union behaviour that pluralist analysts maintain (as Clegg,



1976, notes). Observers who adopt this perspective invariably have an a priori antipathy to the CGT because of its opposition to existing social structures and its refusal to play the game following the 'rules' of industrial relations. The evaluative overtones of calls for 'permanent bargaining' (Adam et al, 1972) or the recommendation of US or German models (Landier, 1981) are therefore clear in France, more so than when advocated elsewhere.

Any study of the French industrial relations scene which sees, for example, CGT principles and doctrine as aberrations, and dangerous to boot (eg. Kendall, 1975) is, consciously or unconsciously, refusing to examine all the contradictions inherent in current economic structures. The analysis offered here follows Hyman in seeing the 'system' as something other than a smoothly functioning machine through which inevitable antagonisms are processed for the greater good of all:

... the notion of an industrial relations system ... is of analytical value only if it incorporates the existence of contradictory processes and forces, and hence treats instability and stability as of equal significance as 'system outcomes' (Hyman, 1975: 12).

#### French Employers and the Unions

The previous chapter outlined the doctrine of the

trade unions; in order to understand French industrial relations, the nature of the employers must also be examined since they can be just as intransigent and aggressive, both verbally and physically, as the revolutionary unions: in certain big companies like Citroen, Talbot and Michelin and perhaps even more so in small businesses, physical violence towards unionists is far from rare<sup>1</sup>. It may be argued, along with Kendall (1975: 75), that unyielding attitudes adopted by the patronat on the one hand and the CGT on the other are mutually reinforcing. To give one example, comités d'entreprise were effectively neutralised as bodies with any economic influence after 1948 because employers considered the CGT was attempting to use them as 'class struggle organisms' (Brizay, 1975: 98) or indeed as potential soviets (Reynaud, 1975a: 240).

If it is foolhardy to generalise, one can nonetheless say that paternalism is widespread and the patron de droit divin who has never accepted a trade union presence in his firm is still a common figure among French employers. Unions were not legally entitled to set up branches (sections) in workplaces until 1968 and even then many employers were still loath to accept the fait syndical. This attitude is not restricted to small enterprises: Michelin is notoriously anti-union and paternalist and resigned its membership of the main employers' body, the Conseil National du Patronat Français (CNPF) because it did not prevent the 1968 law (Brizay, 1975: 136). Such attitudes underpin a

reluctance to engage in genuine negotiations with unions which destabilises industrial relations in France.

The CNPF<sup>(2)</sup> is organised around a dual structure of industrial branch federations and inter-industrial regional bodies, like the labour unions; but it also has 'associate members' in the form of 'ginger groups' representing christian, progressive and technocratic opinions, for example. Affiliation is open to all companies including those in the nationalised sector which contributed around 25 percent of CNPF revenue after 1981.

The CNPF is empowered to negotiate agreements with the unions on any matter other than salaries. Thus, it has come to agreements with the Confederations covering pensions, unemployment benefits, redundancy procedures, paid holidays, etc (Martin, 1983: 112-6 and Landier, 1981: Annexe V provide lists).

Weber (1984) has argued that the CGT-CFDT 'unity in action' pact of January 1966 plus the shock of 1968 forced the patronat, led by 'modernist' elements in the CNPF, to finally throw off its protectionist, paternalist skin and recover the leading industrial role it had ceded to the state after the Second World War. Malthusianism<sup>(3)</sup> and introspection gave way among the organised patronat to productivism and free market philosophy and more interest was shown in the institutionalisation of conflict, Weber argues. However, under the impact of economic crisis, the patronat

hardened its attitude towards the unions and actively sought ways to circumvent them (Morville, 1985; Baudouin and Collin, 1983).

The defeat of the Right in 1981 was an unforeseen setback: the employers' 'union', like those of the workers, is nominally apolitical but its sympathies inevitably tend to the Right and the CNPF urged the French to vote for Giscard d'Estaing before the second round of the Presidential elections in May 1981.

Yet it was soon back on the offensive, aided by the failure of the Socialists' initial expansionary policies. Under Fabius especially, the government appeared to be adopting the vocabulary of the patrons, with attempts to legislate for more flexible working hours and contracts and a revaluing of the 'enterprise' which contrasted sharply with what employers saw as the vendetta of the first few months.

Weber (1984: 28) suggests that in the first period of the Socialist government, the 'modernists' were prepared to make a 'historic compromise' with the Left, but fiscal reforms, anti-patron rhetoric and the form the nationalisations took combined to scupper the project.

Subsequently, and especially after Yvon Gattaz succeeded François Ceyrac as 'patron des patrons', the CNPF leaned towards a neo-liberal approach, arguing for denationalisation (another incursion into the political arena deemed unwise by some members) and the 'motor role' of the private sector in industrial regeneration

rather than the technocratic state.

Two other groups speak for sections of the patronat: the Confédération Générale des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises (CGPME) represents those small businessmen who still have day to day control of their companies. Firms can be members of both the CNPF and the CGPME and the latter has representatives on the various committees of the former while still being represented in its own right in negotiations with the unions. Le Syndicat National de la Petite et Moyenne Industrie (SNPMI) emerged after a split within the CGPME in 1975: it is outspoken on behalf of 'le vrai patronat de base', believing the CNPF to be too much under the control of the larger companies.

Though deemed 'representative' organisations for the negotiation of legally recognised collective agreements with the unions, the CNPF and CGPME are not necessarily representative of all shades of employer opinion: indeed, sections of the French patronat are fiercely independent and hostile to any form of organised representation - Weber's thesis attracted criticism on these grounds (Weber, 1984: 42-3).

The heterogeneity of the patronat does not conceal a widespread anti-unionism. This may be translated into repression, paternalism or more sophisticated direct appeals to the workforce or the exploitation of labour legislation to circumvent the unions (Morville, 1985; Baudouin and Collin, 1983). The end result is that

relations between employers and unions at all levels are tense and in the past neither side has really accepted the legitimacy of the other.

This explains why worker representative institutions in France are only grudgingly accepted in the workplace, if at all: rather than the outcome of negotiations between the two sides, these structures have invariably been imposed on the employer by law at a time when the balance of power was decisively in favour of the workers.

Thus, following the great strike wave of 1936, the formal right to belong to a union was established and employee representatives, délégués du personnel (DP), introduced. After the Second World War, with the employer class largely discredited, companies were obliged to set up workplace committees, comités d'entreprise (CE), which gave workers limited rights in the economic and social life of the firm. In 1968, after the nationwide strikes of May and June, union branches (sections syndicales) were legally recognised in the workplace for the first time.

Each of these advances was snatched from the employers during periods of social unrest: thus, rather than representing areas of consensus within the workplace, they might better be seen as industrial vehicles for the continuation of the wider ideological war being waged outside. As noted above, employers have restricted the role of the committees due to the threat posed within them by the 'revolutionary' unions.

However, confronted with the greater threat of the open organisation of union workplace branches, many employers have hastened to set up committees since 1968 and chosen to discuss problems there rather than directly with the unions (Goetschy, 1985). Reynaud (1975a: 250) suggests that this suits some of the unions since they are less implicated in any agreements finally reached.

The various institutions (their function, composition and rights) will be looked at in more detail when the changes made by Auroux are examined in the next chapter. First, the role of collective negotiations in France is outlined to further illustrate the fundamental lack of consensus.

#### Collective Bargaining in France

Kendall (1975: 74) argues that:

... the character of French collective bargaining, the nature of industrial relations, is backward almost beyond belief. The social outlook of French employers, their unwillingness to recognise unions and bargain collectively, is certainly the first cause. The failure of the unions, notably the CGT, to muster the forces or the will to force the employers to heel is certainly the second.

By 'backward', Kendall appears to mean the lack of legitimacy afforded to each side by the other and the

resulting fragility of any agreements reached. The 'problem' is that the CGT, and on occasions the CFDT, sees material and even structural gains within the present system as partly illusory since control (and the greater part of the benefits of that system) still remains with the capitalist and managerial class. Since they oppose the system, 'revolutionary' unionists are reluctant to sanction it in any way or accept as their ultimate aim changes which leave the system intact and the workers happier with it.

However, this position is paradoxical in that union action would not be sustainable for long if it was not seen to have some tangible impact and to convert positive rapports de force into gains (be they material or structural) some form of negotiated agreement is usually necessary. The CGT, and until recently the CFDT, have always been happiest negotiating in the heat of action: it is clear in these circumstances that the employers or the state have only made concessions because they have been forced to and gains here can be contrasted with the meagre pickings to be had from négociations à froid. This attitude is held even in firms where the CGT is well organised, as was the case at the SKF factory in Ivry visited during fieldwork. One CGT activist was explicit:

Ici, à chaque fois qu'on a réussi à décrocher quelque chose, c'est sur des rapports de force... On n'a jamais pu avoir



quoi que ce soit sans rapports de force - c'est-à-dire mobilisation, mobilisation des gens avant de négocier... On n'a jamais eu rien d'acquis sans ça... C'est arrivé qu'on n'a pu mobiliser sur les mots d'ordre. Eh bien, quand on est arrivé en réunion, le Directeur disait: 'Bon, voilà, c'est deux pour cent...' Pas question de négocier: ça s'arrêtait là... Des fois, il discutait après, mais il avait déjà dit non. (A)

On the other hand, at the equally well-organised Chapelle Darblay works near Rouen, the CGT convenor spoke about picking up the phone to resolve problems with management: but even here, the capacity to discuss and solve problems was not put down to any shared notion of legitimate grievances but to the rapports de force. The CGT was capable of stopping production in the unit and management knew it. A similar situation prevailed at Renault, leading some commentators to speak misleadingly of CGT-management 'cogestion' in the company (see, for instance, Le Monde, 17th October 1985).

'Agreement' is therefore a relative term in France. An accord, for the CGT and for many CFDT activists too, is never in any sense 'final' and even if it signs, the CGT tends to immediately raise certain points for renegotiation. An agreement

... is not part of the progressive

creation of a different order of things, but an expression of the balance of power (Dubois et al, 1978: 71).

The CFDT had a similar outlook in the period following the 'unity in action' pact with the CGT (January 1966) until the recentrage of 1978. Thus, CFDT leader Edmond Maire could write: .

Consignation écrite des concessions obtenues, l'accord n'est jamais considéré par l'organisation syndicale comme la signature de la paix mais tout au plus comme un armistice toujours susceptible d'être remis en cause (Maire and Julliard, 1975: 104). (B)

Recentrage adopted in 1978 (see Syndicalisme Hebdo, 1703, 4th May 1978) heralded a fundamental shift, with the CFDT henceforth seeking to pursue 'realistic' (or rather immediately realisable) demands on the ground through negotiations. Thus, the CFDT is now actively involved in trying to establish solid contractual relations in France based on negotiations in good faith on issues which will have a tangible effect for the workers concerned.

The Résolution Générale adopted at the CFDT's June 1985 conference in Bordeaux (see Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2065, 9th May 1985 for the text) confirmed the priority afforded to contracts over legislation, now considered

appropriate for fixing the framework for negotiated agreements, not the details of industrial life as is common in many respects, still. The establishment of sturdy negotiating structures is seen as a test of union efficiency (and therefore one pillar of the strategy for building a strong labour movement).

The contrast with the politicised slogans of the 1970s is complete. For the Confederation now, the employer is no longer to be seen as the class enemy: rather, he has a legitimate function to perform in the company and between the differing 'logics' of the patron and the workforce, there should be 'conflictual cooperation'. By 1986, leader Edmond Maire was even questioning the anti-capitalist basis of CFDT doctrine, pointing out that capitalism had been forced to adapt under union and political pressure and trade union strategy had to take such advances into account. Maire's prescription -

Au grand rêve de la rupture nous  
substituons - avec un réalisme qui n'exclut  
nullement l'ambition - l'action quotidienne  
de transformation (Le Monde, March 5th 1986) (C)

- situated the CFDT squarely in the 'reformist' camp, 'ambition' nowadays referring to gains that are possible within the present system.

This line is contested within the Confederation (see Raybould, 1985a; and the Bordeaux conference report in

Syndicalisme Hebdo, No.2071, 20th June 1985) but the Résolution Générale at Bordeaux was adopted by a 67 percent majority and the Confederation has actively set an example in recent negotiations (on 'flexibility', retraining, etc).

At one level, this espousal of la politique contractuelle brings the CFDT closer to the three other 'reformist' Confederations but its conception of bargaining still leaves it some way from FO.

The latter, while ideologically prepared to negotiate in good faith within the present system (seeking only to remedy imperfections, particularly regarding the distribution of profits) sees any benefits gained as sacrosanct, to be built upon but never to be bargained over in subsequent negotiations. This notion of avantages acquis, or simply acquis, the idea that they are irreversible, an addition fractionnée rather than specific, distinct agreements (Adam et al, 1972: 83) has enormous strength amongst grassroots militants and is a powerful barrier to the establishment of solid bargaining structures in France, especially at workplace level.

The failure of the 'flexibility' talks of 1984 (to be examined later) illustrate the refusal to 'bargain' in its primary sense of making a transaction: each side is suspicious of the sincerity or even the capacity of the other to fulfil their part of any bargain and as a result the unions cling on dearly to the status quo, thereby retaining advantages won during trials of

strength, advantages more than likely to be taken from them should the rapports de force become less favourable.

However, the CFDT leadership is now prepared to take gambles during collective bargaining, making openings to the CNPF which it hopes could unleash a 'social dynamic'. For this, it is necessary to have a view of negotiations as 'donnant donnant' - give and take. If some acquis can be exchanged for others which better satisfy the needs of the workforce, then the CFDT is prepared to bargain:

... il ne s'agit nullement d'accepter  
n'importe quoi mais de voir si nos acquis  
n'ont pas à changer, à se développer sur de  
nouveaux terrains. (Syndicalisme Hebdo,  
No.2045, 19th December 1984). (D)

FO still tends to see acquis as the results of class struggle and any abandonment as a betrayal of the workers.

FO has a similar attitude (and again it is close to the CGT in this instance) towards labour legislation, including those aspects agreed in negotiations between employers and unions and subsequently translated into the legal Code by the government. The Code du Travail is inviolate for both FO and the CGT unless changes are deemed positive by them.

In contrast, the CFDT, as the thrust of the

Résolution Générale at Bordeaux made clear, nowadays feels the law should be restricted to providing the framework for negotiations: global legislation is ill-adapted to the specific needs of individual companies and their workers and negotiated agreements are not only more flexible but more likely to be respected by both sides, the CFDT feels.

Serious obstacles to such an approach remain. For example, at workplace level, activists, even those in CFDT syndicats, still retain the old attitude to negotiations. Respect for agreements entails some sort of 'policing' role for the union, which is difficult for a French militant to assume. The militant's link to the workers is such that he is obliged to take up any grievances and rivalry between the various syndicats raises the problem of surenchère: to attract workers, one union might make demands so high they have little realistic chance of succeeding and every chance of provoking a dispute when hopes are dashed.

Nonetheless, at Confederation level at least, there does now exist a will amongst four of the the five main confederations to treat negotiations seriously, as legitimate union action likely to bring real gains.

Much therefore depends on the response of the patronat: as we saw above, employers have been every bit as intransigent as the unions in the past and only conceded bargaining rights with reluctance in 1936. A first law on collective agreements in 1919 produced results in most branches but fell into disuse before

long with the hostility of the CGTU towards 'collaboration' and the authoritarian attitudes of the employers bearing the responsibility (Reynaud, 1975a: 176).

A 1950 law also had an impact only in the short term but it was important in that it set up the national, single industry agreement as the model for French negotiations. This suited both sides - the unions because it meant that a maximum number of workers, including those in unorganised plants, were covered, and the employers because minimum wages were fixed and this afforded some protection against the 'unfair competition' of bosses who might be able to force down wages below the level of their rivals (Goetschy and Martin, 1981: 192).

National negotiations, between the Confederations and the CNPF directly, developed in the 1960s: these tend to fix general principles which are then applied at the level of the industrial branch and, where appropriate, the company, by further negotiations. At workplace level, there have been some innovatory negotiations in the past (notably the Renault agreement on the fourth week of paid holidays in 1955) but until very recently employers were totally opposed to any talks at this level.

Negotiations over wages (which are still, after all, at the heart of most union demands and the cause of most strikes) therefore have traditionally had little real meaning in France. Minimum rates in each industry, in

theory negotiated between union and employer Federations, often merely move in line with the national minimum wage set by the government: they then become the springboard for union action in individual firms to increase real wages even though these, ultimately, are often set by unilateral management decisions:

Le sens réel de la négociation est d'alimenter une guérilla locale, beaucoup plus efficace qu'elle et qui intéresse beaucoup plus directement les salariés.

(Reynaud, 1975a: 211). (E)

If one also recalls that French salaries contain a high proportion of long service, 'good behaviour' and 'merit' bonuses, determined largely by management alone, then the insignificance of the negotiating process becomes clearer still (cf. Gallie, 1978: Ch.4).

It is a complex matter trying to apportion 'responsibility' for the relative insignificance of real bargaining in France. Mutually antagonistic ideologies and historical choices made by political actors would seem best to account for the low institutionalisation of industrial conflict and the primacy afforded to action over negotiation (Gallie, 1983: Chs.10 and 12). Bunel and Saglio (1977) argue that ideology (more than any structural factors such as plant size or technology) lies behind the employers' rejection of negotiation. Their study found no commitment to bargaining even in



those firms where the 'revolutionary' unions were in a minority position. Only industrial action managed to get the employer to the negotiating table. The authors found a strong desire amongst patrons to retain total control of their firms, even at the expense of any possible expansion of capacity: such a strong commitment to personal power clearly leaves little room for any dilution by contractual agreement.

Dubois et al (1978: 72) agree, noting 'the reduced propensity of either side of industry to conduct negotiations outside actual dispute situations, at least at plant level': this they link to 'the absence of any consensus as to the ultimate aim of negotiations'. (They also point out a further symptom of the low institutionalisation of conflict - the lack of recourse to the extensive conciliation, mediation and arbitration machinery).

In the face of this entrenched hostility of the employers (and given the tendency of the French state to involve itself directly in all aspects of labour relations via the Inspecteurs du Travail, the Préfets and legislation) it is not surprising that the French labour movement has traditionally aimed at pursuing workers' interests through strike activity aimed as much at the government of the day as at industry. Yet the CFDT has evolved, as we have seen, and the outlook for bargaining has changed with it.

The patronat, too, has evolved, but not in the same direction. Spurred on by the need to control costs more

closely due to the economic recession, the CNPF has advocated much greater 'individualisation' of salaries, with wage rises linked both to the performance of the worker and the financial health of the company (See Le Monde, 24th November 1984: 'La nouvelle politique salariale du CNPF'). There would evidently be little scope here for any union negotiations, especially given the general tendency of the CFDT in particular to look for a flattening of the wage hierarchy.

The CNPF has added its voice to those on the Right calling for an end to the 'monopoly' on representation enjoyed by the five large Confederations (plus FEN) which gives them certain advantages in workplace elections and, in allowing them to set up sections irrespective of their real weight in the firm, also means they are automatically empowered to negotiate agreements with the employer (Le Monde, 12th July 1985). Any change in the criteria of 'representativity' <sup>(\*)</sup> would doubtless leave more pliable 'negotiators' facing the employer (non-unionised workers, house unions, etc).

In the run-up to the 1986 elections, employer pressure groups became more and more insistent that, given the increasing diversity of firms, salaries, working time and whole work contracts should be fixed at workplace level: more often than not, these schemes suggest negotiators other than unions (special délégués du personnel with extended powers, the comités d'entreprise, etc). The abandonment of the Code du Travail, or at least much more freedom to 'negotiate'

contracts with certain clauses departing from legal norms, are explicitly advocated<sup>(8)</sup>.

The reversal of the previous orientation is remarkable.

#### NOTES

1. A few examples at random:

In November 1984, a Turkish CGT member was shot dead during an industrial dispute by a company 'bodyguard', perhaps with the complicity of his employer (Le Monde, 13th November 1984).

In February 1982, 200 armed 'mercenaries' stormed a cheese factory in the west of France to recover 750,000 Camemberts in the possession of occupying workers (Fredet and Pingaud, 1982: 53).

Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2050, 24th January 1985, reported the suspended prison sentences given to seven foremen at Citroen (all CSL activists) for intimidation, GBH, racist insults and impeding union activity.

2. See Martin (1983) for the functioning of the CNPF and a brief outline of its history and policies. See also Reynaud (1975a: Chapter 2; Lefranc (1975); Weber (1986) and Brizay (1975).

3. Meaning here, in its economic sense, the restriction of output in order to support prices and the related restriction of imports and free trade.

4. 'Representativity', for legal purposes, has, since the Law of 11th February 1950, been determined by: membership numbers; financial health; independence (from

parties, employers and the government); 'experience'; and the 'patriotic attitude' demonstrated during the Occupation (Rivero and Savatier, 1984: 153).

5. See 'L'entreprise au coeur du dialogue social', (Le Monde, 3rd April 1985) for a discussion of some of these projects.

#### TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

(A) 'Here, every time we've managed to get anything, it's because we've managed to get ourselves into a position of strength - by mobilisation, mobilising the lads ahead of the negotiations. Without that, we'd never get anything... Sometimes, they don't come out, or don't work to rule, or whatever. So we arrive at the meeting and the boss says: "OK. Two percent." No question of negotiating: that's as far as it goes... Sometimes, he discussed things after, but he'd already said no.' (CGT, SKF).

(B) 'An agreement just sets down in writing the concessions that have been won: it is never seen by the trade union as a signing of the peace, but at the very most as a truce that is always likely to be called into question.' (Maire and Julliard, 1975: 104).

(C) 'In place of the great dream of a clean break with capitalism, we advocate - with a realism which does not exclude ambition - day by day transformation.'

(Edmond Maire, Le Monde, 5th March 1986).

(D) '... it is not a question of accepting just anything, but of seeing whether things won in the past need to change, or be developed in new directions.'  
(CFDT, Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2045, 19th December 1984).

(E) 'The real meaning of these negotiations lies in the substance they provide for localised 'guerilla' activity which is much more effective and concerns the workforce a lot more directly.' (Reynaud, 1975a: 211).

#### 4. THE AUROUX LAWS

In the aftermath of the Left victory, and in an attempt to forestall what it reckoned would be a dirigiste government, the CNPF decided to revive negotiations, la politique contractuelle, at national and industrial branch level and at the same time try to avoid serious discussions at workplace level, in part by opening up more channels of 'direct dialogue' with the workforce (Fredet and Pingaud, 1982: 175-7).

The CNPF's greatest fear was that the Socialists would want to impose the unions as 'partenaires obligés' in their firms - and in this they were quite correct.

The report on 'Les Droits des Travailleurs' bearing the name of Labour Minister Jean Auroux<sup>(1)</sup> indeed saw a stronger union presence in the workplace as an essential plank of the Socialist plan to place negotiation at the heart of French industrial relations, to make negotiating 'le mode normal de fonctionnement des relations sociales' (p.31).

Underlining the fact that, hitherto, negotiation had not been the strong point of either unions or employers, Auroux maintained that his proposals, if implemented, would herald:

... une transformation profonde et durable  
des relations industrielles dans notre pays et  
... une véritable rupture avec le modèle

existant (p.39). (A)

In reality, the Report advocated for the most part only the strengthening of existing rights: with the exception of the new groupes d'expression, it was a question of extending but not fundamentally reworking the role of existing institutions.

The Report argued that working people must be given the same democratic rights in their working life that they had won outside the work place:

Citoyens dans la cité, les travailleurs  
doivent l'être aussi dans leur entreprise  
(p.3).

However, this was seen not only as a matter of social justice ('La recherche de profits immédiats a trop souvent ignoré les intérêts légitimes des travailleurs' - p.3) (C) but also one of economic efficiency: the main asset of the developed world in the current crisis was seen as the quality of its workforce, and for this to be exploited to the full, there had to be an unleashing of energies and capabilities (p.5). The unions had fought to maintain industry and jobs, therefore their new rights in this field were a guarantee of France's economic future.

There were four main axes to the Report grouped around two central themes. The first theme was noted

above: the workers must be citizens in the work place. This entailed: a) the re-establishment and enlargement of workers' rights and b) the 'reconstitution of the work place collectivity'.

The second theme was that workers must become 'actors of change' in their company which required: c) an enhanced role for work place institutions and d) a revival of negotiations.

a) Workers' Rights. The report recommended a tightening-up of controls on arbitrary employer sanctions and, more innovative, advocated a 'right of expression' for workers on their working conditions. The existing Health and Safety Committee and the Committee for the Improvement of Working Conditions should be merged and given an extended brief to study conditions, make proposals and ensure legislation was respected.

b) The Reconstitution of the Workplace Collectivity. This entailed a reversal of the present trend (towards 'un éclatement de la collectivité du travail') which was leading towards a dual society. Auroux was guided here by two principles:

i) Workers should be able to look forward to a contract which guaranteed their full social rights and, as far as possible, their continued employment.

ii) Companies should have a certain flexibility in their use of manpower but 'legitimate' flexibility meant, say, using temporary workers when vital staff



members were absent. Temporary and contract workers were not to be used in permanent jobs: the contrat à durée indéterminée (the permanent job) was to be the rule and other types of contract closely regulated exceptions.

Furthermore, contract workers, temps, part-timers, etc, were to enjoy the same rights as other, permanent workers as far as possible.

c) An Increased Role for Representative Institutions. Auroux suggested the adaptation of representative institutions in smaller firms to try and lighten the 'threshold effect'<sup>2</sup>: it was accepted that the cost of representation in these companies was sometimes a burden. New institutions covering small firms on the same site were suggested but it was left to industry to make suggestions. On the other hand, measures were suggested to make it less easy for an employer to avoid holding elections for committees over long periods.

It was recommended that there be more union and worker representatives in larger firms and all representatives should go on economics courses paid for by the employer.

The CE's economic role was to be extended and its social role (organising canteens, outings, etc.) maintained; it was to have access to a wider range of information and expert advice to help it assess the data. This, the report argued, would enable the workers to have a real check on what was happening in their

company and give them some capacity to put forward proposals if events were moving against their interests (p.25). Each committee was to have increased funding from the employer to enable it to function.

The Report called for new committees to be set up at group level where crucial decisions were often made without representatives having any right to question them.

It was to be made less easy to sack or refuse to reinstate workers who had some representative role (especially those who put their jobs on the line by calling for elections when no committee or délégués existed).

d) The Relaunch of Collective Negotiations. Auroux noted that millions of workers were still not covered by any collective agreement (a full thirty years after the 1950 law on negotiations) or only covered by agreements which were out of date. He urged all means to be taken (including the extension of agreements by the Labour Inspectorate to branches not covered) to ensure all workers came under an agreement.

Conciliation, mediation and arbitration procedures would be more rapid and rejection of findings by either side would henceforth have to be accompanied by a motive, so that the workers could see the explanations.

The most far-reaching recommendation was for annual negotiations on wages and other central aspects of working life to be made obligatory at branch and

workplace level. Furthermore, in order to ensure the credibility of agreements at firm level, Auroux recommended that they should be signed by unions representing a certain percentage of the workforce. (Hitherto, a minority union could sign an agreement and make it valid for all).

However:

Cette obligation de négocier n'implique pas l'obligation de conclure mais il faudra que les négociations soient sérieuses et non pas formelles (p.38). (D)

If, on the employer's side, this meant that he should at least hear out the unions' proposals and claims, on their side it implied taking into account the economic context - hence, union representatives were to get all the information destined for the CE and receive the same economics training.

Despite the cries from the patronat, the Auroux report and the laws which followed do not represent any revolutionary break with the capitalist system and essential authority relationships within that system remained intact. Auroux's aim was to introduce an element of consensus into French industrial relations by stimulating each side of industry into taking into account the interests of the other, this in itself being seen as a factor in economic recovery:

S'il n'est pas question de remettre en cause dans le secteur privé l'unité de direction et de décision dans l'entreprise, il convient d'instituer des mécanismes qui rendent possible l'expression de toutes les énergies et les capacités (pp.4-5). (E)

Auroux was even more explicit in the parliamentary debate on his proposed legislation:

Nous reconnaissons le droit et la responsabilité d'entreprendre, nous reconnaissons l'unité de direction et la responsabilité de gestion de l'employeur. Mais nous disons aussi que dans cette collectivité de travail, dont nous savons bien qu'y coexistent et qu'y coexisteront encore des antagonismes d'intérêt comme dans toute société humaine, il importe que les uns prennent davantage conscience de la dimension humaine de l'entreprise et les autres davantage conscience de sa dimension économique; la démocratie dans l'entreprise est porteuse d'efficacité économique qui en absorbe rapidement les coûts (Le Monde, 14th May 1982). (F)

Thus, Auroux left all power of decision in the hands

of the employer despite the widened brief of the various representative institutions. The employer could still make unilateral decisions on wages after 'seriously' listening to union claims; he was in no way bound by the opinion of his CE; and his economic power was not affected in any way by Auroux's changes.

Kesselman (1983a: 35), in a review of the first phase of the PS programme, argues that:

... the government is serving as a midwife to ease the transition to a mode of pluralist and corporatist regulation long prevalent elsewhere.

Essentially, the working class was to be harnessed to a project of economic 'modernisation' under the leadership of 'middle strata' which only sought to alter property relations where that was necessary for its industrial strategy. It was 'rationalising' rather than democratising industrial relations and the breadth of the reforms in this field could not conceal what was little more than an attempt at corporatist integration.

Although critics have made much of the 'turnaround' in government policy from June 1982, the germ of its new discourse was already evident in the early phase and, indeed, the Auroux report. The anti-employer rhetoric of the first few months (Fredet and Pingaud, 1982) was a perhaps understandable political reaction: the Socialists nonetheless were attached to the value of

enterprise and in seeking to introduce a form of 'conflictual cooperation' (3) they sought above all to make industrial relations mechanisms function more smoothly: the previous model was not only socially divisive, it was costly when inevitable frustrations failed to find an outlet and on too many occasions these frustrations had imperilled the state itself.

The government was later obliged, in the context of a longer international recession than it had reckoned on and a general hostility towards any coordinated reflation in Europe or the wider developed world, to put its emphasis on economic rationalisation and it then rapidly became clear that the Auroux legislation had changed little in terms of worker power or even of worker input. As Coriat (1984) has suggested, if the lois Auroux opposed previous trends on certain points, they were added onto and mixed in with previous laws rather than substituted for them. It was therefore comparatively easy for the government to tinker further with the legislation later to achieve more 'flexibility' in labour practices (once its preferred path of a contractual agreement between the 'social partners' foundered).

Morville (1985) also situates the Auroux laws in the lineage of previous legislation (and negotiated agreements). For him, the transformation of the wage relationship is a continuous process even if it reaches high points at times of Left rule: adaptation was continuous from 1968 because of the success of union

battles, employer and government policies and the recession.

However, Morville concurs with Savatier (1982) and Laroque (1984) in seeing legislation as designed primarily to limit the inherent inequality in the employer-worker relationship.

This was certainly a stated aim of Auroux. Yet the 1982 laws can also be seen as an attempt to incorporate a union movement which has been particularly combative in the past and doctrinally hostile to any integration within capitalism. Constraints on the employer are part of the pay-off for a more 'responsible' attitude from the unions. Furthermore, in luring the labour movement into reliance on the legal system to achieve its aims, the Auroux reforms may be seen as a further step in the 'legalisation of the working class' (Edelman, 1978) or another example of:

... toute l'ambiguïté des droits reconnus  
à la classe ouvrière, chaque 'acquis'  
l'enserrant un peu plus dans un filet  
légaliste qui lui est fondamentalement hostile  
et renforce globalement le système économique  
(Vacarie, 1982: 119-20; cf. Kourchid, 1980). (6)

The problem with this sort of analysis is that it tends to see union action which accepts to stay within the contours of legislation as futile in the long term and any action which tries to broaden the legislation as

actively sanctioning the whole socio-economic system.

Objectively, the judiciary may be hostile to the labour movement, as Vacarie describes, and legislation may serve to 'ensnare' unions: the fact that the incoming Right wing government in 1986 had no sweeping plans to repeal the Auroux laws supports the argument that they (and perhaps much labour legislation in general) pose no threat to capital.

But unions, on both the 'revolutionary' and 'reformist' wings, have fought for help from the law to give them some protection against untrammelled market forces and arbitrary employer practices; and, for their part, employers have fiercely resisted such legislation. Thus, if legislative advance is in no way revolutionary, it can represent shifting 'frontiers of control' between labour and capital and once on the statute book, much depends on how the unions choose to use it and whether they have the strength to impose measures contested by the employers.

The rest of this chapter first summarises the main points of the Auroux laws and then outlines the attitudes of the various Confederations (and employers' bodies) before looking at the possible long term implications.

### The Legislation

The Report spawned four laws in 1982 (a fifth dealing with the democratisation of the public sector



followed in 1983) and a series of ordonnances dealing mainly with forms of work contract and working time.

The Law of August 4th 1982(4) laid down ground rules for companies' disciplinary procedures (règlement intérieur), restricting these to questions of discipline and matters affecting health and safety and laying down obligatory steps in the event of any sanctions.

This law also introduced groupes d'expression (GE) - groups of workers set up to give their opinions on the content and organisation of their work and how working conditions might be improved. The law specified that opinions should be expressed collectively and directly, that is, without the intermediary of unions, other representatives or management.

The law of 28th October 1982 related to representative institutions. There were few novel clauses in the sections dealing with unions in the workplace<sup>(5)</sup> though sections, or workplace branches, were now legally recognised in all firms, including those with less than 50 workers which were excluded before. However, in the smaller firms, there were no designated delegates with special rights (though a délégué du personnel could function also as a union representative if the union so wished).

Greater time off for union business was introduced (paid time off was introduced for the first time in firms with 50 to 150 employees) and a subsequent decree

of 8th June 1983 slightly altered the number of delegates allowed in firms with over 2000 workers.

In firms with over 500 workers, those syndicats which had members elected to the CE in the cadres' or foremen's college in addition to the manual and office workers' category were allowed a supplementary union delegate from among the former groups. (This aspect of the law, contested by the CGC, formed part of the government's policy of accepting the pluralism of cadres' unionism and with it the representative credentials of those cadres unions affiliated to worker Confederations).

In firms with over 2,000 workers in at least two separate plants, a délégué central d'entreprise was introduced with a monthly credit of 20 hours for his functions. (In smaller firms a regular delegate could fill the function with no addition to his quota of 10 to 20 hours off).

Sections affiliated to any of the five representative Confederations were recognised as of right; others had to prove their status at firm level by reference to the normal criteria of representativity.

Unions no longer had to collect subscriptions outside of working hours and away from the shop floor or office but the distribution of tracts and so on was still in theory restricted to the start or end of a shift. Union meetings could be held within the plant though out of working hours and away from the shop floor.

Premises for the use of the unions were to be made available in plants of over 200 workers: in those of over 1,000 workers, this meant one office per section, equipped as necessary (that is, with typewriter, phone, furniture, etc.).

For the first time, it was legal for the delegates to move freely around the plant, or indeed outside, to do their union work, as well as stay behind after their shift. Unions could also now invite outsiders to meetings but if they were not unionists the employer's permission was required.

The délégué du personnel (DP) is the elected representative from an office or work shop empowered to approach the employer with individual grievances concerning salaries, the application of laws and agreements, etc. He, too, was now entitled to move around the work place to fulfil his role.

The number of DPs (elected from among union candidates or, if less than 50 percent of the eligible workers do not vote and a second round is required, from open lists) was altered slightly and - a new feature - if no CE had been elected, the DPs could take on its functions.

The main innovation of this section was the introduction of délégués de site: the departmental labour authorities could, if a union demanded or on their own initiative, impose elections on a group of firms (individually employing less than the normal threshold of 11 workers for DPs) on the same site where

more than 50 people in total were working, if 'the nature and importance of problems common to those firms justified it'.

CEs are obligatory in firms with over 50 workers. (For both CE and DP elections contract workers and part-timers putting in more than 20 hours per week were henceforth to be included when working out 'thresholds').

Auroux significantly enlarged the economic and financial prerogatives of the CE though it still remains a consultative body only, able to proffer opinions but not impose decisions on the employer. The CE exists to ensure:

... une expression collective des salariés, permettant la prise en compte permanente de leurs intérêts, dans les décisions relatives à la gestion et à l'évolution économique et financière de l'entreprise, à l'organisation du travail et aux techniques de production (Code du Travail, Article 431.4). (H)

Thus, the CE was to examine the state of the company and assess this in terms of its implications for the workforce. The employer, who chairs the committee, was obliged to consult and inform it on the general health of the company; on any price increases; in the event of any reorganisation (of production, of subsidiaries,

etc.); on new holdings or purchases of other firms; before the introduction of 'important' new technology projects if they were likely to have any impact on employment, skills, salaries, conditions of employment, etc. (The latter was a new clause in 1982).

The CE is consulted over any redundancy plans and its opinions are transmitted to the labour inspectorate which has to decide on the plan proposed. It was henceforth to be consulted on general employment conditions and in certain precise cases - for example, timetables and rotas - the employer cannot make changes against the committee's wishes.

Each new CE was to be given a document detailing the shareholdings in the company, its position in any group and its financial health; at least once a year a full financial report was required - Auroux specified new, obligatory elements such as the transfer of capital between firms of the same group; state or local authority grants; and (in larger firms) the use of productive capacity. Quarterly reports were also required.

Two to four members of the CE can attend board meetings and now they had the right to put motions before the board.

As foreshadowed in his report, Auroux introduced the requirement in larger firms for an 'economic commission' to be elected from within the CE, to report back to the CE on its analysis of documents provided by the employer. Each member of the CE was now to be given some

economics training (a course lasting up to five days) by a reputable body which might or might not be attached to a union.

The CEs were previously allowed recourse to an expert to help them read the annual accounts: expert advice could now also be taken if redundancies were planned; if new technology was to be introduced (into firms of over 300 workers); and for other reasons, but then at the CE's expense.

For the first time, Auroux inserted a clause specifying that the employer had to provide a sum equal to 0.2 percent of the gross wage bill to allow the committee to function (to pay for staff, experts, etc), this sum being in addition to the money provided for social and cultural activities.

Each CE has between three and fifteen elected members (depending on the size of the company) plus one representative from each union section.

In firms made up of several distinct plants, there are comités d'établissements (CEts) functioning like the CEs above plus a comité central d'entreprise (CCE) to examine general economic matters applying to the whole firm. (The representatives on the CCE are elected by each CET from within its number).

The biggest innovation of this particular law was to set up comités de groupe (CG) in groups whose headquarters were in France. Members were designated by unions from among and in proportion to their members on the CEs of the various companies. The role of the CG was

generally limited to the receiving and dissemination of information on the financial state of the group and employment matters.

The law of 13th November 1982 introduced an obligation on employers to negotiate annually in firms on real wages and working time and at branch level on wages (once a year) and gradings (every five years at least). The legal requirement held for firms of any size where there was at least one union present.

It was possible for one or more unions which gained more than half the eligible votes at the last CE or DP election to veto an agreement which had clauses on salaries which went against agreements reached at a higher level, or clauses on other matters which departed from labour legislation. It should be noted that this fell far short of the indication in the Auroux report that unions signing an agreement would have to be representative of a certain percentage of the workforce for it to be valid.

This same law made some alteration to the procedures available for the ending of industrial disputes. In particular, the Labour Minister could now institute mediation procedures of his own accord.

Finally, the Law of 23rd December 1982 introduced Comités d'hygiène, de sécurité et des conditions de travail (CHSCT) in place of the previously separate Health and Safety Committees and the Committee for the

Improvement of Working Conditions. They were now obligatory in all firms with more than fifty workers and if they were not set up, the DPs were empowered to carry on their function.

They analyse risks to safety and general working conditions, run regular inspections and enquiries in the event of accidents and can propose improvements with a view to the prevention of accidents. The employer may refuse to implement these but is obliged to give specific reasons. He has to consult the committee prior to any change in work posts, speeds, etc. and anything else which may have an effect on working conditions. Experts may be called in (at the employer's expense) to assess particular risks.

Members of the CHSCT are chosen by elected CE members and the DPs. In line with the conditions covering other representative functions, time spent on committee work is considered as working time and in firms with over 300 workers courses of up to five days are provided for members.

This law also introduced - another innovation - the right for an employee to alert the employer if he felt himself at any risk and to move away from that risk without permission.

#### Union Reaction to the Auroux Laws

All the major confederations were consulted ahead of the Auroux report and before the subsequent Bills were introduced into parliament. Each saw its influence in



some aspects of Auroux's changes. Naturally, then, each also was broadly favourable to the legislation, with more or less serious reservations.

FO was most critical in two central areas of the legislation: the right of expression and the legal obligation to negotiate in companies.

The 'right of expression' it described as a dangerous measure<sup>(e)</sup>. It therefore advised its activists not to press for negotiations on the matter; not to sign agreements; to limit the scope and effectiveness of the groups if they were set up; and to advise workers they were not obliged to participate.

It had both practical and doctrinal reservations. Practically, employers might use the groups to justify then apply greater work speeds, and so on; workers might be penalised for comments despite the law; meetings were loosely structured and could degenerate, perhaps leaving foremen and other members of the shop floor hierarchy open to ridicule, or worse; and the groups might be used for 'political agitation' - FO claimed similar structures in Italy had opened the way for 'permanent terrorism' in factories with Red Brigade support.

To those who talked of the potential for 'worker control', FO retorted with its traditional line that any 'association à la gestion' implied the integration of both the workers and the unions who were to negotiate the setting up of groups and FO did not see this as part of its function.

Fundamentally, the groups would do little more than pave the way for greater exploitation, with the workers' complicity, FO argued. Improved productivity would end up as the main aim, with better conditions only arriving as an accessory. The groups would create illusions of progress that would speedily degenerate into disillusion and thence manipulation.

Finally, FO saw the groups undermining the representative unionism it is attached to: to improve working conditions (a collective question) there were specific bodies (CE, CHSCT) in which the union was better able to defend interests and give voice to aspirations. Real, guaranteed improvements could be had only through negotiation and collective agreement (FO pointed to the 17th March 1975 national agreement on the improvement of working conditions as an example).

The CFDT<sup>(7)</sup> had a quite different view, in line with its post-recentrage policy of opening up the union to the workers, in order to hear what they really wanted rather than imposing policies on them in their name. Thus, it saw the right of expression as 'une chance exceptionnelle' to 'modifier les relations de travail dans l'entreprise et de transformer les conditions et le contenu de leur travail' (Book 3, S'exprimer dans l'entreprise: 5). (1)

Rather than a threat to the union and its role, the CFDT saw the groups as unleashing a dynamic which would strengthen the collective power of the workers and their

representative institutions:

Permettre la libération de la parole des travailleurs et des travailleuses pour qu'ils deviennent les acteurs du changement et d'abord sur ce qui les touche le plus directement, leur travail, c'est ce que la CFDT a mis au coeur de sa stratégie autogestionnaire. (Ibid). (J)

The CGT<sup>(a)</sup> also fully supported the right of expression but it clearly sought to go beyond the rather narrow limits imposed by the legislation and apparently also wanted its militants to have a more active role (as militants) within them.

In fact, the CGT saw the droit d'expression as a droit d'intervention in embryo. It had, since the late 1970s, called for conseils d'atelier (and they were set up in state sector firms, giving workers more input into the running of their departments) and it urged its activists to move the groups in this direction, saying matters of work and production could not be isolated to workshop or even plant level - the whole running of the company was implicated (p.18). In short, the groupes d'expression were:

.. un moyen nouveau d'intervention sur le fonctionnement, voire la gestion même de leur entreprise (p.14). (Emphasis added). (K)

Where the CFDT's autogestionnaire approach envisaged workers discussing problems of their immediate tasks and building on this to eventually assume a role in the running of the whole firm, the CGT clearly envisaged a more immediate decision-making role under union tutelage.

The CFTC<sup>(7)</sup>, perhaps fearful of the sort of approach advocated by the CGT, was in favour of the groupes d'expression but cautioned that they could degenerate into Soviets or anarchy... In contrast to the CFDT it wanted a direct role for the unions and also felt that foremen should guide the discussions. Above all, it was concerned to see that the groups complemented the unions and were not used by management to avoid the established circuits of worker representation.

The CGC<sup>(10)</sup>, while hesitant on the changes in union legislation, was generally in favour of the measures to increase worker involvement. However, it, too, was worried that the groups would conflict with established channels of communication. It was also very concerned that front-line managers and foremen would be attacked and undermined in the types of discussion envisaged under the law.

In that respect, it was quite close to FO whose brand of unionism it has come to regard as somewhat archaic. Yet the CGC also shared FO's criticism of the

change to collective bargaining legislation. Both saw the legal requirement to negotiate in any firm where there was a union section as likely to increase the inequalities between unionised and non-unionised sectors. Both were worried that the facility to agree exemptions from laws or agreements reached at a higher level would be exploited in poorly organised firms.

Finally, both questioned even the modified veto allowed under the new law. The CGC argued that it was a representative organisation at national level and that all the major Confederations should stand on the same footing when it came to the validity of any agreements they signed. Not only was a veto of any sort likely to block the whole field of collective negotiation, it also ran counter to the pluralism enshrined in French practice and jurisprudence: on both these counts, the CGC argued, Auroux was sponsoring legislation quite contrary to the spirit of his report and was effectively offering support to 'maximalist' unions at the expense of reformist practices which had guaranteed the workers at least some social progress over the years.

Both the CGC and FO felt that plant bargaining would undermine the relative strength the French unions could muster at industrial branch level where most negotiations took place (and branch bargaining has become FO's raison d'être). As FO put it:

On va balkaniser la politique conventionnelle  
et, la divisant, inéluctablement l'affaiblir. (L)

It was sceptical of the CFDT's enthusiasm for inter-company agreements, seeing the extension of branch agreements to non-participating firms by ministerial decree as a sounder way of protecting the interests of workers in small firms. FO was also concerned that the legislation might prompt more employers to set up house unions and negotiate worthless agreements with them. The CFTC shared most of these qualms though it was satisfied with the eventual watered down veto clause.

The CFDT took quite the opposite view. It saw the possibility of negotiating across a group of small firms as a way of getting a foothold in an area where unions were absent but where they needed to make an impact in order to survive the demise of the great manufacturing plants. Thus, the law of 13th November 1982 was described by the CFDT as:

... une loi qui favorise le renouvellement des pratiques, nécessaire au renouveau du syndicalisme (Book 7: 5). (M)

Unions had to be imaginative and aware of constraints: what was feasible in large firms was not always advisable in smaller units.

Dans ce sens, il faudra le plus souvent rechercher des droits équivalents, mais pas nécessairement identiques (Book 8: 15). (N)

To convince employers of their interest in negotiating, the CFDT fell back onto the argument used by the state (and FO) to justify branch agreements and 'extensions': these eliminated 'unfair competition' which might otherwise come from employers who paid poverty-line wages. The CFDT argued that the 'rigidities' of all-embracing branch agreements could be avoided by engaging in discussions covering just a few local units.

For the same reason, it was not opposed to plant agreements with clauses which modified legal requirements and was especially pleased that the obligatory aspect of the legislation would allow:

l'établissement des règles particulières  
d'organisation du temps de travail  
correspondant aux souhaits collectifs des  
travailleurs et aux particularités des  
entreprises (Book 7: 23). (0)

(The CGC, with its 'new unionism' discourse is also generally aware of the need for flexibility of this sort: its opposition to this law should therefore be seen in the light of what it saw as the advantages offered to the 'revolutionary' unions and the threat to its own representativity).

The CFDT and the CGT both bemoaned the lack of a real veto. For the CGT this was 'contempt for

democracy': the 'veto' included in the legislation was a caricature - its existence actually questioned the traditional principle that agreements should not contain clauses less favourable to the workers than those in an agreement at a higher level or legal requirements.

The CFDT, as noted above, did not oppose such clauses but it felt an agreement's validity needed to be underwritten by some test of 'Real' representativity applied to the unions that signed it. This lacuna seemed to throw it back onto the traditional method of rejecting agreements signed by minority unions - the show of force:

Pour la CFDT, c'est finalement la capacité d'une action mobilisatrice débouchant sur un accord qui reste la meilleure garantie contre les accords 'au rabais' (Book 7: 17). (P)

The CGT's concept of negotiation ('un droit acquis par les luttes des travailleurs à côté des autres droits') (Q) has little to do with 'give and take': it is about strength, the rapports de force, and all forms of action are legitimate in the furtherance of demands (CGT, undated: 89-90).

It is opposed to dérogations, or modifications, of branch agreements or legislation in any way which in its estimation makes the new clause inferior, but



nonetheless places great stress in its recent literature on the negotiation of real wages at plant level. It follows the argument in the Auroux report that the best plant agreements could provide targets for branch negotiators, while branch agreements at least guaranteed certain minimum conditions in poorly organised firms (p.93).

For the CGT, it is not the level of negotiations which is important but the doctrine which informs the union arguments: negotiations are conducted on a terrain de classe - the employer is not a 'partner' but an adversary and to combat his strength a mass organisation has to ensure mass mobilisation.

Negotiations at any level provide an opening for unions to make their mark: and, importantly, the CGT did not want to restrict discussions to wages and basic conditions. These were aspects of wider company policy and for demands to be realised, the union needed also to have an input into decisions on investment, costs, work organisation, and so on (60-65). (The novelty of the CGT interest in such areas and the position of the other Confederations is analysed in greater detail in Chapter 6).

Other aspects of the strengthening of the representative institutions were broadly welcomed (though the CGC felt itself discriminated against by the extra cadre representative for the worker Confederations and by the way CCEs were elected which effectively

excluded its members). The comités de groupe and the general pattern of greater union access to financial data and expertise were applauded on all sides.

As for lacunae, both the CGC and CFTC were disappointed that there was no provision for workers to take seats on company boards (such measures were introduced in the public sector and, it should be remembered, the government intended state-run firms to act as a model for the private sector). The CFTC had also wanted an extension of profit-sharing schemes and measures encouraging greater recourse to the arbitration and mediation apparatus.

#### Industrial Relations after Auroux

A decentralisation of union activity has been evident for some time in France: Auroux's measures provided further impetus, as did the decentralisation of the political apparatus which devolved the control of local funds to elected bodies and gave unionists greater access to support services in their fight for jobs, plus a role in regional planning. The revival of local Comités d'Emploi through an agreement with the CNPF worked in the same direction.

Including as it did a government-imposed wage freeze and the start of economic 'rigour', the year 1982 may seem an unlikely date to signal an effort to revive wage bargaining at branch and company level.

However, government figures show that 71.5 percent of those firms required to negotiate during 1985 did so. As this was up from 43 percent in 1983, the first full year after the Auroux legislation came into effect, and 68 percent in 1984, the Labour Ministry was reasonably content. Nonetheless, only 3972 out of the 10,225 firms surveyed in 1984 actually concluded an agreement and 36 percent of the 3457 that did not negotiate at all with the unions entered into some form of talks with CEs or DPs, presumably more tractable. The preliminary 1985 figures showed that 5,165 agreements had been reached - up by about one third: but the Ministry noted a growing individualisation of pay awards within the overall agreements plus an increase in what might be labelled 'profit-related bonuses'. (Le Monde, 28th June 1985 and 21st June 1986).

In its recommendations to employers, the CNPF (1983) still gave priority to industrial branch negotiations (though in the first half of 1986, only 30 percent of branches had signed an agreement, down from 33 percent at the same stage of 1985).

CNPF policy was to follow the Auroux laws to the letter but the spirit is totally absent from its thinking. It counsels members strongly not to include the provisions in branch or company agreements since this would tend to make it harder to undo the damage when the laws were abrogated. Since 1983, the CNPF has softened its appeals for a repeal of the lois Auroux, but some members of the new Right wing government have

questioned union 'monopoly' - the facility for the main Confederations alone to put up candidates in the first round of work place elections - and advocated certain other adjustments to union rights. By this route, the employers might be able to sponsor more 'responsible' elements (as they are wont to do in favour of FO sections in some cases).

It is clear that French employers show no interest in having strong unions, even 'responsible' ones in their plants. They continue to try and neutralise the work place as an arena of union-employer relations and attempt to defuse tensions by the 'social innovations' introduced in the 1970s (Morville, 1985).

Early appraisals of the functioning of GEs<sup>(11)</sup> reveal the employers using them to legitimate past innovations, following the logic of Quality Circles, for example, by using the new groups to rally the employees in a way

...susceptible de faire surgir des idées pour améliorer la productivité et la qualité du travail et susceptible de détendre les relations sociales par une meilleure circulation de l'information, un assouplissement des relations avec la maîtrise et une prise en compte de la dimension individuelle des salariés (Linhart, 1983: 5). (R)

The radical notions of the CFDT - workers assuming control of the organisation of their work as a schooling in autogestion - and the militant CGT outlook - seize the opportunity of group discussion to expand the area of intervention of the workers and their union in the company - are both a long way from being realised. Researchers at CNAM noted the disorientation of activists (or outright hostility, in the case of FO) in the face of the new groupes d'expression which were erected outside the traditional structures of representative unionism and for which management was much better prepared.

Although it may be too early to gauge the effects of measures such as the obligatory annual negotiations, the employers' rejection of measures which threaten their prerogatives in the workplace undoubtedly limit the chances of real change in the French industrial relations system and any prospect of a serious union role in industrial decision-making which will be crucial if they are to have an influence on employment issues.

Perhaps those chances disappeared as soon as Auroux decided against making the validity of agreements dependent on the true representativity of the signatories: such timidity may be understandable in view of the patronat's suspicions of anything appearing to strengthen the CGT but, given the transformation of the CFDT and Auroux's own vision as set out in the 1981 Report, greater confidence in the negotiating apparatus was to have been expected and may have increased the

legitimacy of bargaining in the eyes of both workers and employers.

Observers such as Adam et al (1972) and Gallie (1978) have suggested that more frequent meetings between the 'social partners' could take some of the tension out of relations but the ideological underpinning of both union and employer activity needs to change for this to happen. Obligatory meetings by themselves can have little effect if the will to negotiate 'in good faith' is absent. This is truer than ever today when employment is at the heart of the socio-economic debate yet remains firmly outside the negotiating arena. Some of the Confederations are trying to stake out a space for union action here but far from conceding ground, employers have succeeded in getting the new government to reduce even the slight restrictions imposed by Direction de Travail permission for redundancies (which CEs can attempt to influence).

Union doctrine is evolving in such a way that the Confederations for the most part no longer see positive action on industrial and economic policy as taboo. Yet employer opposition remains intransigent and Auroux did nothing to alter the unequal balance of power between employers and workers which might force the former to take more account of the collective interest of the latter, as expressed by the unions.

In fact, unionists' attitudes towards accepting responsibilities in this area are ambiguous, and union divisions - or the 'pluralism' underwritten by Auroux -

were just as responsible for halting any effective union offensive on jobs which, even more than on other matters, requires constructive, reasoned exposition backed up by real strength on the ground rather than surenchere and the potential but unpredictable threat of spontaneous rebellion.

These observations are taken further in later chapters and Chapter 6 includes a look at the ways in which Auroux tried to encourage 'proposition force unionism'. The next chapter examines the government's employment policies and the Confederations' response.

#### NOTES

1. Page numbers in this chapter refer to the report listed in the bibliography under 'AURoux, Jean (1981)'.

2. The apparent reluctance of employers to take on new staff if this would make the company eligible to have DPs, CEs, etc.

3. To use the CFDT formula.

4. French laws are traditionally referred to by the date on which they are promulgated. Details of the legislation under discussion can be found in Liaisons Sociales (1984). See also Le Monde, 'Dossiers et Documents', 102, June 1983; and, in English, Delamotte (1985) and Goetschy and Rojot (1985).

5. However, foreign workers no longer need to have worked for five years in France before taking on a union post and the rule restricting foreigners to no more than a third of administrative posts in any syndicat was also

abolished. These measures, together with the elimination of the rule that elected representatives (DPs, CE members, etc) had to speak French plus the amnesty offered to illegal immigrants, played a part in giving Citroen workers, for example, the courage to organise after years of oppression (see Benoit, 1982).

6. FO's analysis and critique are contained in a dossier, Les Lois Dites 'Auroux', assembled by its Centre de Formation de Militants Syndicaux.

7. The CFDT's analysis is contained in a series of ten booklets under the collective title, Les Droits Nouveaux (undated).

8. The CGT's analysis is taken from its publication, Le Guide des Droits Nouveaux (undated).

9. The CFTC's presentation of the laws is contained in a special supplement to Syndicalisme CFTC - Informations Confédérales, 181, March 1983.

10. For the CGC's attitude to the Auroux report and legislation, see Menin (1982) and the editions of its journal, Cadres et Maîtrise, December 1981 and March 1982.

11. See the reports produced by the Association de Recherche sur la Libre Expression des Travailleurs, CNAM, Paris.

#### TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

(A) '...a deep and lasting transformation of industrial relations in our country and ... a real break with the existing model.' (Auroux, 1981: 39).



(B) 'Citizens in the city, the workers must also be citizens in their workplace.' (p.3).

(C) 'The search for quick profits has all too often ignored the legitimate interests of the workers.' (p.3).

(D) 'This obligation to negotiate does not imply any requirement to conclude an agreement but the negotiations must be serious and not a mere formality.' (p.38).

(E) 'While there is no question of compromising the unity of management and decision-making in the private sector, it is appropriate to set up structures which allow the expression of everyone's energy and capacities.' (pp.4-5).

(F) 'We recognise the right to be, and the responsibilities of being, an entrepreneur; we recognise the unity of direction and the employer's responsibility for management. But we also say that in the workplace collectivity, while there are and always will be differing interests as in all human society, it is important that the one side is more aware of the human dimension of the firm and the other more aware of its economic dimension; workplace democracy brings with it economic efficiency which rapidly absorbs its costs.' (Le Monde, 14th May 1982).

(G) '... the whole ambiguity of the rights conceded to the working class, each 'victory' drawing it a little more into a legalistic net which is fundamentally hostile to it and, taken as a whole, reinforces the economic system.' (Vacarie, 1982: 119-20).

(H) '... a collective voice for the employees, allowing their interests to be taken permanently into account in all decisions concerning the management and economic and financial development of the firm, the organisation of work and the techniques of production.' (Code du Travail, Article 431.4).

(I) '... an exceptional chance to modify workplace relationships and transform the conditions and content of their work.' (CFDT, Book 3: 5).

(J) 'This is what the CFDT has put at the centre of its strategy for 'self-managed socialism': give the working people a voice so they become the actors of change - and first of all in what concerns them most directly, their actual work.' (ibid).

(K) '... new means to intervene in the functioning, the management even, of their company.' (CGT, undated: 14; emphasis added).

(L) 'Negotiations are going to be balkanised and, in

their divided form, inevitably weakened.' (FO).

(M) '... a law which favours a renewal of practices which is necessary for the renewal of trade unionism.' (CFDT, Book 7: 5).

(N) 'Thus, it is more often than not necessary to look for rights which are equivalent, not necessarily identical.' (CFDT, Book 8: 15).

(O) '... the establishment of specific rules concerning the organisation of working time which correspond to the collective wishes of the workforce and the particularities of the company.' (CFDT, Book 7: 23).

(P) 'For the CFDT, at the end of the day, it is the capacity to mobilise for a particular agreement which is the best safeguard against 'cut price' deals.' (CFDT, Book 7: 17).

(Q) '... a right won by the workers taking action, like all the other rights.' (CGT)

(R) '... likely to bring out ideas on improving productivity and the quality of work, and likely to make workplace relations less tense by better circulation of information, more supple relations with supervisors and a recognition of an employee's individual dimension.' (Linhart, 1983: 5).

## 5. THE CONFEDERATIONS AND EMPLOYMENT POLICY

The number one priority of the new Left government from June 1981 was unemployment, as Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy made clear in his keynote speech to the National Assembly on 15th September, 1981:

L'objectif est clair: remettre la France  
toute entière au travail. Et d'abord arrêter  
l'augmentation rapide du chômage. (A)

Many of the government's measures in the first year directly or indirectly addressed this priority and it is this aspect of policy that concerns us here rather than any overall appraisal of the Socialists' economic programme.

Much has already been written on the economic record of the 1981-86 government and battle-lines are already well-established, usually fixed along political and ideological lines.

The 'consensus view' of French economic policy during the period (as J-P. Fitoussi terms it in Machin and Wright, 1985) goes briefly as follows:

1) Initial policies of expansion and social redistribution were foolhardy and doomed from the start in view of the depression in the leading world economies.

2) The period of economic rigour from the summer of

1982 was a necessary correction to the first expansionary phase.

The results of the period as a whole are open to debate (witness the various contributions to Machin and Wright, 1985; Cobham, 1985; Kesselman 1983c) but it is worth underlining the fact that France never slipped into recession (in the sense of negative growth) unlike the UK with its markedly different policies during the period.

An academic study (cited in The Guardian, 18th March 1986) concluded that 'the French had managed to achieve a more satisfactory trade-off between unemployment and inflation'. However, the terms of this trade-off proved a disappointment to labour movement activists, particularly those who had been looking for a more fundamental transformation of economic policy than actually occurred, even during the first phase.

A common complaint of many activist from all the Confederations was that the government had no real employment policy. This seems somewhat harsh as the early 'social' measures (including the Auroux labour legislation), the economic expansion, the nationalisations (seen as providing a laboratory for new industrial relations) and an industrial policy apparently aimed at reconquering the domestic market and concentrating on specific filières<sup>1</sup> without abandoning traditional sectors such as steel and coal, were all concerned in different ways with the problem of employment.

However, from the start, and increasingly from June 1982, the industrial approach to the issue progressively gave way to an emphasis on le traitement social, which essentially involved adapting and cutting the labour force to the needs of industry rather than constructing an industrial policy around the problem of employment.

In retrospect, it is possible to separate out three strands<sup>(2)</sup> to the government's employment policy:

1) Direct job creation. Around 240,000 jobs were created between 1981 and 1983, including 110,000 in the Civil Service, 35,000 in the health service and 65,000 in local government with the aid of central government subsidies.

2) Indirect job creation through financial and budgetary measures, the shorter working week, longer holidays, the earlier retirement age, etc.

P-A. Muet and A. Fonteneau (1983) estimated the effect of measures such as the raising of the minimum wage and benefit levels and general expansion at around 100,000 jobs between 1981 and 1983.

P-A. Muet (in Machin and Wright, 1985: 78) observes that 'most specialists' reckon the fifth week's holiday introduced by a January 1982 decree had little impact on unemployment.

The same decree also brought the legal working week down to 39 from 40 hours, at the same time allowing a certain relaxation of the restrictions on working at

weekends, night work for women, etc.

Despite claims to the contrary by the CFDT, the effects of this reduction seem to have been limited: indeed, the government realised from the start that only a large drop in the working week could dent the unemployment figures and it therefore set a target of a 35 hour week by 1985. This target was eventually shelved and attempts to revive it in mid-1984 stalled due to the vastly changed industrial relations climate by that time, with the patronat in the ascendant and the government beginning to respond to its calls for 'flexibility' and the lightening of 'social' burdens.

It is hard to say what effect the 39 hour week (with pay left unchanged after the intervention of President Mitterrand and strikes in several sectors) and other measures such as the Auroux laws and the raising of the minimum wage had on company profitability though Muet reckons that overall (with the reduction and the new work patterns allowed under the decree taken into account) gains in productivity probably offset the direct costs.

The impact on employment has been measured in two studies: an econometric analysis estimated that 70,000 jobs were created or saved - 40,000 in industry, 20,000 in the service sector and 10,000 in state firms; a study by INSEE based on replies from a random sample of employers put the figure at between 14,000 and 18,000 jobs created in industry and commerce and, very tentatively, 50,000 to 100,000 in the economy as a whole

(Ministère des Affaires Sociales, Travail Informations,  
January - March 1984).

Neither estimate justifies the initial optimism of the government and the CFDT.

3) Schemes introduced to subsidise jobs, encourage youth employment and take older workers out of the labour market appear to have been more successful, at least in bringing down the statistical level of unemployment. Muet (1985: 80) notes that these schemes were continued even after the change in economic policy from June 1982 and 'the levelling off of unemployment from mid-1982 until the last part of 1983 can be largely imputed to them' (3). He cites figures showing that the macro-economic effects of the schemes (on GDP, inflation, the balance of payments, national debt, etc) were small.

Among the more important measures were:

a) Youth employment schemes and apprenticeships (insertion professionnelle) involving around 267,000 youngsters in 1982-3 and 236,000 in the nine months to March 1984.

b) Contrats de solidarité-préretraite under which workers over 55 retired early or worked part-time and state aid was given to their company to hire other workers if they then contracted to maintain the overall size of the workforce for at least a year. Such contracts allowed just over 170,000 new people to be taken on by companies during 1982-3.



(Other state schemes, some dating from before 1981, made aid available for early retirement without any corresponding employment commitments. As firms began to shed labour more rapidly in the 1980s, early (and state-subsidised) retirement became a favoured option and at least 432,000 people were benefitting from the main state scheme at the end of 1983).

c) Contrats de solidarité-durée du travail. If a company took on a worker as a result of a larger than legally required reduction in the working week, the state contracted to pay all or part of the employer's national insurance and related costs. In 1982, 736 contracts covering 15,000 new recruits were signed but this dropped to just 277 and 3,000 respectively under the revised 1983 scheme.

d) State aid for those unemployed people wishing to start their own businesses helped 29,000 in 1981, 40,000 in 1982 and 20,000 in the first quarter of 1983.

e) When the government decided to push ahead with the 'modernisation' effort in 1984, the state undertook to subsidise congés de conversion in particular industrial branches (eg. steel, shipbuilding, the car industry). A worker was paid a high percentage of his previous wage while following a retraining or skill conversion course.

f) In the car industry, the government provided financial assistance to those immigrant workers wishing to return home.

In a further effort to reduce the dole queues and incite employers to hire workers, the government also softened its line on what constituted acceptable employment practices.

Early in 1982 it had introduced legislation restricting recourse to various 'insecure' forms of contract (fixed period contracts, temporary work, etc) (see Chapter 8 on the 'flexibility' talks and Chapter 4 on the Auroux report). Two years later, while refusing to follow the CNPF in its more extreme advocacy of the benefits of total deregulation of workplace regulations, the Socialist government accepted that the use of labour needed to be less rigidly controlled, in the process implicitly elbowing aside the ambition of 'reconstituting the work place collectivity' so clearly set out in the Auroux report, placing new emphasis on the enterprise and even taking pains to point out the potential of agreements which set aside the law, as already allowed by the Code du Travail in certain circumstances. (In this it was following a change in the political climate which was partly the result of its own economic failures and the propaganda success of the patronat, which had quickly recovered from its initial shock at the 1981 election results. A SOFRES poll in Le Matin of 26th February 1985 showed that the concepts of 'competition' and 'liberalism' were judged positive by 71 percent and 63 percent respectively).

The broad lines of the Confederations' own demands and proposals in the field of employment are given below

along with their attitude to the government in this respect. The national flexibility negotiations are discussed after the concrete examples, in the case studies, of how union activists attempted to tackle employment problems in their workplace.

### The French Trade Union Confederations and Employment

Lange, Ross and Vannicelli (1982: 8) argue that the major French unions did not fundamentally change their framework of analysis of the world economy with the 1970s recession; rather, they reacted to that downturn 'on the basis of frameworks which had been developed prior to crisis and in other circumstances'.

As far as Confederation analyses are concerned, that evaluation seems accurate. However, in both the CGT and CFDT there have been developments in the way grassroots activists tackle problems and these were stimulated, if not initiated in the strictest sense, by the Confederation leaderships around the turn of the decade (see the next two chapters).

Lange et al only touch on these developments fleetingly as they chose to concentrate on the union leadership: besides, their study ended just as the political events of 1981 intervened and the new types of union initiatives outlined below only really began to flourish in the new political climate, even if the groundwork for the change was effected earlier.

However, at the level of the union leaderships, too - in the case of the CGT and CFDT, at least - there has

been a change in the way economic problems are addressed. These are discussed in their own right in this chapter and in the case studies and following chapters the extent of the changes and their significance will become clear.

### The CFDT

It would seem from an examination of the 1981-6 period that what Ross (in Lange et al) termed the 'reformist reading of recentrage' has gained sway within the CFDT though its chief advocates in the ruling Bureau National were also the least popular with the rank and file (Raybould, 1985a).

It is important to note again that since its recentrage of 1978, the CFDT has placed great stress on negotiated solutions to employment and other problems. The strength of mobilisation is still an important factor behind a successful resolution of such problems but nowadays the Confederation is prepared to compromise in order to achieve settlements applicable immediately rather than channel discontent towards political ends.

Various provisions of the Auroux laws, notably the right to company information, the annual negotiations and the increased means available to the representatives both reflected and underpinned the CFDT line. The Confederation published a series of booklets designed to show the militants how to assimilate the information available and then how to use it in the fight to save or create jobs<sup>(4)</sup>.

The stress is on action at the company level, the 'lieu principal de l'intervention syndicale' (CFDT, 1984: 25). But the process of information gathering and reflection on the broader industrial questions may be best pursued at the level of the industrial branch and the CFDT therefore participates energetically in all the tripartite bodies dealing with such matters in France (notably those attached to the Plan, the national and regional Comités Economiques et Sociaux and the Groupes de Stratégies Industrielles set up by the Socialists). The Confederation also places great stress on territorial initiatives on industrial sites, in bassins d'emploi and in the Regions. Action at this level is a CFDT priority in its efforts to offset the effects on jobs of new technology:

La CFDT agit et pèse de tout son poids pour que des emplois alternatifs soient dégagés simultanément à l'introduction des nouvelles technologies et aux suppressions d'emploi qu'elles causent. L'expérience montre que ces solutions ne peuvent pas être uniquement recherchées dans l'entreprise concernée, mais dans tout le bassin d'emploi et par une coopération active de toutes les parties prenantes. (CFDT Activités et Orientations, published prior to the 40th Congress in a special edition of Syndicalisme Hebdo, December 1984: 18-19). (B)

Before moving on to specific aspects of the Confederation programme for jobs, its espousal of 'new solidarities' should be mentioned. The CFDT has long sought to help the lower paid and narrow differentials. Now, the CFDT wants to extend its solidarity to those out of work and those threatened with losing their jobs. Some elements within the CFDT bend the notion further, seeing - though they take care as a rule not to state it quite so explicitly - the need for 'solidarity' with employers since competitiveness needs to be assured in the market economy, especially in its present open form. Of the other Confederations, the CGC is closest to the CFDT line though it baulks at any narrowing of differentials that 'solidarity' might involve.

The CFDT's analysis of the crisis during the 1970s had been two-pronged. On the one hand, the international economy had been jolted out of the stability of the post-war period by the emergence of multinational companies and the threat to US economic domination from the Japanese and European countries. The oil crisis of 1971-4 had merely exacerbated the emerging problems of inflation and unemployment which resulted from the dislocation of international trade and financial arrangements.

On the other hand, the CFDT argued that the position of France had been weakened by de Gaulle's push for growth which had led to balance of payments crises while

the subsequent deflationary strategy of Prime Minister Barre under Giscard and the attempt to bank all on export performance had similarly failed. Furthermore, both strategies had fuelled social discontent in France which had also put stress on the economy.

The CFDT concluded that growth should be based on the internal market and not exports but beyond general ideas about developing industries that would reduce imports, the CFDT, as late as the mid-1970s, saw no solution to the crisis within the capitalist system: a totally different mode of development was required<sup>(8)</sup>.

The 1978 recentrage was not so much concerned with analysing the nature of the crisis as with the most effective form of union action to fight it and the most important conclusion of Moreau's report was that trade unionists must begin to tackle real problems in the workplace if they wanted to defend an increasingly disillusioned work force. The change in outlook this required is best illustrated by two quotes, separated by five years in time, from the CFDT official with responsibility for economic affairs, Michel Rolant. In a 1975 statement cited by Lange et al (1982: 43) he affirmed:

We do not believe that there exists a durable solution to this crisis within the confines of a capitalist society.

By 1980, he was right behind the Moreau/Maire line:

Un type de développement s'infléchit et se renverse vers le socialisme autogestionnaire au fil des milliers d'infléchissements que nous sommes capables d'imposer par la lutte syndicale (CFDT Aujourd'hui, 43, May-June 1980: 82). (C)

Autogestion was now seen as a process, synonymous with piecemeal advance coming with victories within capitalism rather than an alternative system which could only exist after capitalism was overthrown.

Of course, this view of the potential for change within capitalism was not uncontested though gradually a majority within the Confederation was won over and it is their programme which forms the basis of the following outline.

The main plank of the CFDT's proposals to fight unemployment is a reduction in working time:

La réduction de la durée du travail continue, et doit continuer plus activement, à être considérée comme la solution immédiate la plus importante pour réduire le chômage. (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2010, 29th March 1984). (D)

One headquarters officer in the Economics Sector conceded in 1985 that the CFDT's over-reliance on this



one aspect (especially the failure to situate it fully in the wider macroeconomic context) had been simplistic but a reduction in the working week remained 'le point de passage obligé' of any serious attempt to bring down unemployment. He maintained that the CFDT had been the first to push the shorter working week as a measure to fight unemployment and had strongly influenced the membership of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) in this respect.

FO claimed, however, that the ETUC followed its demand of no loss of pay with the shorter working week. The CFDT distinguishes itself from the other Confederations in not automatically demanding compensation for the hours not worked. After the January 1982 ordonnance which reduced the legal working week from 40 to 39 hours, the CFDT earned itself the scorn of the rest of the labour movement in arguing this point: President Mitterrand eventually ruled in favour of total compensation after industry was hit by stoppages.

The CFDT has now moved away from a simple call for reduced working time; it agrees with most of the studies produced in this area - a reduction will only have an impact on employment if unit costs are held down and general competitiveness maintained. (See, for example, the November 1984 report drawn up by the Planning Commissariat, in Liaisons Sociales, S1 664, 19th November 1984).

This will often mean that timetables are rearranged and work organised differently to ensure production

levels are maintained. The CFDT was therefore totally in favour of the clause in the 1982 ordonnance which allowed departures from the strict rules governing shift patterns and so on, by agreement with the unions.

At the Confederation's 40th Congress in June 1985, Edmond Maire was categoric in his refusal of a blanket reduction in the working week in his reply to the General Debate:

Je voudrais répondre à ceux qui revendiquent les 35 heures par la loi avec maintien intégral du pouvoir d'achat sans rien changer à la gestion du travail dans les entreprises que ce qu'ils nous proposent non seulement ne créerait pas d'emplois durables, mais aboutirait finalement à augmenter le chômage, car chacun le sait, bien des entreprises ne pourraient pas tenir le choc. Ne jouons pas aux apprentis-sorcières avec des slogans dangereux. (E)

The CFDT fully supported another instrument which required workers to make sacrifices (or demonstrate their 'new-style solidarity') by accepting a temporary slight fall in wages in order to fund job-creating investments. Payments into the investment fund were for a fixed period, usually at an advantageous interest rate. Such Fonds Salariaux were set up in various companies following the law of 29th December 1983 which

authorised them. (See Chapters 7 and 9 for the Renault example).

Les fonds ainsi prélevés ne sont pas une perte sèche du pouvoir d'achat mais un transfert provisoire et négocié du salaire direct afin de le faire 'travailler' pour la priorité d'aujourd'hui: l'emploi.

(Syndicalisme Hebdo, Special Issue - 40th Congress, December 1984: 18). (F)

The Fonds Salariaux concept appears to epitomise the approach of the CFDT in the 1980's. The involvement of the state is limited to the legislation fixing the framework; each scheme is negotiated at firm level and the use the funds are put to is made by joint union-management decision; the whole scheme involves a series of compromises - between management and union, and between those in work and those needing it - aimed at an immediate improvement of the employment situation.

The CFDT supported the sharing of work and revenues in other ways, too, not least in what amounted to an about-turn on the question of 'le travail différencié', the various forms of contract, part-time and temporary work which, especially from the mid-1970s, have served to fragment the traditional notion of the work contract.

In 1982, the CFDT and the rest of the labour movement inspired the series of decrees which restricted the employer's recourse to such 'precarious' work forms

yet, as the CNPF pressed the government to relax these regulations in the name of 'flexibility', the CFDT appeared to acquiesce and accept the priority of a more supple labour market even at the expense of worse conditions for a whole swathe of the workforce.

More important, this was put over as responding to the new, more individualised requirements of the working population and the CFDT became a prime mover behind the 'flexibility' talks discussed below.

The CFDT does not oppose all job loss though, as will be made clearer in the case studies, it seeks to avoid licenciements secs (outright redundancies) and looks to stimulate alternative employment when restructuring or new technology displaces workers. As noted above, the problem is frequently addressed in territorial terms.

In the 1970s, the CFDT led the way in the labour movement's questioning of technology and the uses to which it was put. Its 1977 book, Les Dégâts du Progrès: Les Travailleurs Face au Changement Technique, showed the Confederation trying to rethink, on the basis of grassroots experience, the very concept of technology, the aims and values enshrined in its use in the work place. It saw an urgent need to:

...dissocier progrès et avancée  
technique, de faire éclater les mythes de la  
neutralité de la technique, et, en  
définitive, de changer les critères qui

régissent la notion même d'avancée technique pour en faire réellement un moyen de progrès.

(CFDT, 1977: 10). (G)

Yet the reality of union work on new technology shows that it is still generally geared towards controlling the social effects of its application in the workplace, however far 'upstream' (that is, however long before it is actually installed) negotiations may take place. Thus, the clause on the introduction of new technology was seen as the most significant aspect of the 'flexibility' protocol discussed below by CFDT negotiators despite its rather limited scope.

This apparent reining-in of CFDT ambitions no doubt reflects a desire to be effective which entails certain compromises; it is also dictated to some extent by the seriousness of the employment problem which has been compounded by the rapid technological developments of the last decade. However, there has also been a marked doctrinal shift in the Confederation which is still the cause of internal unrest and has not been accepted by important sections of the union (Mouriaux, 1984a; Raybould, 1985a).

In the final analysis, there is little radical in the CFDT's proposals on transforming working arrangements to save jobs, nor its long-standing concern with improving working conditions, for example. Proposals in these and other areas nowadays tend to respect the constraints within which companies function

under current arrangements and the need to extract a surplus from labour. There is no real attempt to situate employment at the heart of the problem and construct notions of industrial and social efficiency around a core aim of full employment. For the CFDT of the 1980s, the search for jobs involved the workforce moulding itself to the requirements of the market place: in this, the CFDT followed, perhaps even outpaced, the Socialist government and it can only be seen as a retreat from its questioning of the system in the aftermath of 1968 and the defeat of what Lange et al (1982) call the 'Left recenterers' - those accepting to work within the system but concerned to push back its boundaries in the direction of socialism.

At national level, the Confederation played its part in negotiations with the employers on various matters - 'flexibility', of course, but also the restructuring of the Social Security system and working time. It also took part in tripartite bodies such as the Plan and developed its own macroeconomic proposals which were put to Ministers but which did not form the basis of any demands that the Confederation tried to mobilise around.

The CFDT's pronouncements on the economy occasionally irritated Socialist Ministers and attracted the scorn of rival Confederations, not least when, after a meeting with Mitterrand on 31st January 1983, Edmond Maire predicted a further bout of rigueur and underlined the parlous state of the economy (Syndicalisme Hebdo,

1951, 10th February 1983). At that period, the CFDT advocated a relaunch of investment and it seemed to locate the means for this reflation in a revision of the fiscal system, with more tax demanded from top earners and the wealthy and, reversing the prevailing situation, more to come through direct than indirect taxation.

Getting on for two years later, the CFDT was still bemoaning the lack of investment, and this despite the recovery in company finances (at the expense of salaries and those made redundant). Again it called for a fairer tax treatment for wage earners and lower interest rates as immediate steps favourable to reflation and therefore jobs (CFDT, 1984b).

On a broader scale, the CFDT called for European-wide initiatives on research and industrial cooperation and advocated closer commercial and monetary policies (perhaps through wider use of the integrated European Currency Unit) to shake off 'dollar tutelage'. It opposed protectionism, arguing that it was not a long-term solution to problems and French industrialists would use such a shield simply to avoid the investment necessary to modernise the productive apparatus.

The CFDT argued that competitiveness was not achieved through cost-cutting exercises: if industry was to be modernised, the role of the worker had to be transformed, too, and more responsibility passed down to the shop floor.

The CFDT's programme for jobs, in the context of its general economic proposals, is contained in an internal

paper from 1984, La Politique Economique en Questions, in a section entitled Gérer le Présent en Préparant l'Avenir. Here, the CFDT proposes seven forms of action:

1) The creation of new activities and a stimulation of growth in established sectors, with industrial and economic policy geared explicitly towards jobs.

2) The 'modernisation of work place relations' with workers able to debate products, management, investment, training and so on.

The CFDT sought to use the crisis to gain a positive role for the worker in decision-making but it also insisted that an essential part of any strategy to move beyond crisis was precisely this harnessing of the worker's knowledge and capacity to the management process. (The actual mechanisms are somewhat nebulous, with proposals couched in terms such as: 'Une nouvelle dynamique reste à enclencher, fondée sur de nouveaux modes de rapports sociaux et un autre type de développement').

This proposal reflected the CFDT's long-standing belief that capitalism could not be reduced to an economic system - it was also a social system (and an ideology).

3) The reduction and rearrangement of working time.

4) An extended training programme, especially on the job training.

5) Special measures for the worst hit groups, notably the young and the long-term unemployed. Here, the CFDT conceded that fixed term contracts and other



'precarious' work forms could institute a dual labour market but it was confident this could be held in check through negotiation.

6) Local initiatives, especially through revised comités locaux d'emploi which could assist firms in difficulty or take preventive action and generally stimulate job creation.

7) The development of 'socially useful jobs' (for example, home help, work in the leisure industry) to be funded in part through the complementary fall in demand for unemployment benefits.

#### The CGT

Superficially, in the period under study, the CGT took a similar line to the CFDT in placing great stress on action at ground level - 'L'entreprise est et reste le lieu privilégié d'ancrage des interventions et actions des travailleurs' (CGT, 1984b: 116) - and urging its activists to make full use of the Auroux laws in proposing alternatives to management threats to jobs (Munck: 1984). However, where the CFDT sought to work within, if nominally against, the constraints imposed by the economy, the CGT actively set its store against economic trends and refused to compromise with current notions of competitiveness and sound business management.

For the CGT, the crisis was a crisis of the capitalist system. In 1985, it repeated the view of the 41st Congress three years earlier:

La crise à l'échelle du monde capitaliste est en fait le produit de la crise qui se développe dans chaque pays à partir de ses bases nationales. Elle influe à son tour sur le développement de la crise sur chaque territoire national. (Le Peuple, 1192/3, 25th April 1985). (I)

In the 1970s it adopted a perspective close to that of the PCF, indicting the 'monopoly capitalists' who used the state to shore up a rate of profit tending to decline and advocating their expropriation through nationalisation. The cause of the economic problems in France could therefore be laid at their door and on the Right wing governments which supported their concentration on the export market and a limited number of domestic sectors which ultimately proved insufficient in the face of competition from foreign-owned multinationals. The home market had been neglected and when growth did increase it simply led to a sharp rise in imports, especially of household goods. (Under the Socialists, this caused the CGT to be sceptical about the fatality of 'constraints' such as the trade deficit which, it argued, resulted from specific policies and could be reversed by expansionist programmes concentrating on production for the domestic market).

During the 1970s, the solutions advocated by the CGT

were in the first instance political, hence the mobilisation behind the Common Programme of the PS and PCF up until the 1978 elections. After 1978, the CGT, not without opposition, fell in behind the PCF and its attacks on its erstwhile partner. Within the CGT, action was taken in opposition to closures and cut-backs wherever they occurred and anyone deviating from this line, even those within the Confédération arguing for a form of 'proposition force unionism', was denounced for 'class collaboration' (Lange et al, 1982; Ross 1984).

Like the other Confederations, the CGT was taken aback by the Socialist success of May 1981. It gave a guarded 'soutien critique' to the new government and welcomed the nationalisations and early government measures in the field of employment. However, it grew increasingly uneasy with the onset of economic rigour from the middle of 1982 and outright hostility grew from the beginning of 1984 as it became clear that the modernisation of industries such as steel and shipbuilding would proceed with the loss of thousands of jobs.

The CGT's central criticism - and the basis for its action on jobs - was that although there had been political change and a programme of nationalisations, the way the economy and companies were being run differed little from before 1981. The CGT thus called for 'new criteria of management', a concept first developed by Communist economists such as Paul Boccara and introduced into CGT literature from the beginning of

the 1980s. Against the capitalist stress on the ratio of profits to capital, the new formula advanced here looked at the whole of value added to the capital utilised (including that which went on wages, taxes, profits, investment, etc) (Analyses et Documents Economiques, No.3, December 1982, pp.60-1: 'Quels Critères pour une Nouvelle Gestion?').

An essential part in increasing the ratio of value added is played by efforts to economise on the capital used by the elimination of waste. This refers to material waste during the production process but also 'financial waste', by which the CGT means high interest rates paid on loans, dividends, 'salaries' to non-working relatives in a family firm and speculation, especially on the foreign exchange markets (Le Peuple, 1169, 9th February 1984). If costs are to be cut, then the CGT proposes to start with these elements which are seen as a drag on the essential functions of a company - production and employment.

The new criteria introduce a notion of 'profitability' widened out to include the interests of the collectivity, both inside and outside a particular enterprise: many articles stress the social aspects of the new criteria, their relationship to the community through enhanced purchasing power, job creation, social utility even (see, eg., Le Peuple, 1144, 16th-30th November 1982).

This then becomes a basis for action, as will be made clear in the case studies. In fact, the clash with

current practices within industry is perhaps stressed as part of the mobilising function of the union, as will be argued later.

The CGT gives little impression of seeking a compromise when it puts forwards its proposals and their content contrasts sharply with the CFDT's Confederation-level acceptance of the need for increased suppleness in the work place.

The CGT is very wary of 'flexibility' and generally opposes any departure from the legal provisions of the Code du Travail as 'new forms of exploitation' which are usually designed to coerce humans to adapt to the dictates of the machine and squeeze more profit out of capital investment.

It denounced the notions of 'partage du travail' and 'nouvelles solidarités', arguing that few new jobs resulted from any supposed 'job-sharing' arrangements because productivity levels are usually maintained by increasing line speeds and other methods (Analyses et Documents Economiques, 10, April 1984: 12-18: 'L'Offensive Patronale').

It argued that the CFDT line was fatalistic in that it accepted the crisis and sought an 'amputation' of wages as the best way of reducing company costs but maintaining the maximum number of jobs in a society where resources were presumed to be in finite supply. The growth option had been discarded and all the burdens fell on the work force. Implicitly - and sometimes explicitly - the CFDT line is seen as conniving in a

capitalist strategy to make the workers bear the costs of structural change in the economy. (This is also the criticism of the oppositional CFDT Union Régionale of Lower Normandy).

The CGT does join with the CFDT in seeing the shorter working week as one way of reducing the unemployment numbers - but only as long as it accompanies an economic policy geared towards growth and jobs, and as long as pay levels are maintained, otherwise domestic demand and therefore jobs would be hit. It played down the actual impact of the 1982 reductions arguing that jobs were only created in any numbers in the state sector following specific agreements.

As elsewhere, the CGT tried to widen out the economic debate on reduced working time, arguing that it should not be viewed as a cost to the firm but as a benefit to the community, 'socialement rentable' ('socially profitable').

Although, alone of the large Confederations, the CGT refused to sign the July 1981 agreement with the CNPF on working time because of the alterations to legal restrictions that it allowed, it was not opposed to all rearrangement of working hours (especially in the public services when the client or customer stood to benefit) but the workforce had to agree and would therefore expect some advantage from the new system. (See the dossier in Le Peuple, 1168, 26th January 1984; le Peuple, 1178, 30th August 1984: 16-18; and Analyses et

Documents Economiques, 4, February 1983: 4-8).

The CGT's analysis of the unemployment crisis in French industry (CGT, 1984b) locates the root cause in the centralisation of capital, the concentration of industry in the hands of large groups and the need for these groups to dispose of large amounts of liquidity for the investment required to maintain profit levels in the face of fierce competition. Profits need to be realised ever more quickly to allow this rotation of capital and financial criteria thus come to dominate industrial decision-making even more than in the past. Medium-term ventures are handicapped and money is increasingly put to speculative financial use causing investment funds to dry up.

A second cause of the crisis was the decision by the large groups to concentrate on segments of markets - international markets - and invest abroad in commercial or, increasingly, manufacturing ventures. Domestic investments in 'condemned' sectors were abandoned and even relatively modern sites closed down. The coherence of French industrial structures has thus been sacrificed by French-based transnational operators and import penetration facilitated by joint ventures with foreign groups.

The French state backed up the large groups in this strategy by providing a massive infusion of funds to aid redeployment and soak up the social costs involved.

The national interests, particularly those of French workers, were neglected in all this. Even those

remaining in jobs had suffered deskilling as automation was introduced with the sole aim of forcing down labour costs and the employers staged an assault on established conditions.

The CGT saw no way in which such a strategy could solve unemployment and (like the CFDT) pointed to the failure to invest even when profits picked up in 1983 as evidence. This was all the more scandalous for the CGT since profits had risen due to the suppression of jobs and the holding down of salaries, not through any real increase in added value.

The CGT thus called for a new form of growth which integrated economic and social goals. This, it said, would require worker intervention in management and the recovery of national control of industry (which did not exclude international agreements on cooperation). The vehicle for both these aims was nationalisation - though the way in which the state companies were run, the failure to alter the predominance of financial criteria, brought the wrath of the Confederation down on the government, especially when these groups began to lay off staff like any other enterprise after the reversal in government economic priorities from 1982-3.

The union interest in questions of management was not seen as a completely new departure. After all, demands relating to training, working conditions, even on wages all restricted management's options in some way. However, the gravity of the present crisis



necessitated a more direct intervention by the workers in order to impose decisions in their interests:

... les enjeux industriels d'aujourd'hui, l'ampleur de la casse industrielle effectuée au nom des critères de cette gestion capitaliste, exigent que les travailleurs interviennent à tous les niveaux et à toutes les étapes des processus décisionnels qui, dans l'entreprise, définissent stratégie et objectifs généraux de production et transforment ceux-ci en modalités concrètes d'obtention de résultats, c'est-à-dire en mise en oeuvre effective des productions, en volume et contenu d'emplois. (CGT, 1984b: 112). (J)

Like the CFDT, the CGT also underlined the importance of union intervention at the national level, too, in the various organisms of the Plan, for example. It placed more stress than the CFDT on worker action to influence the contrats de plan agreed between the state and the nationalised companies: as will be seen in the case studies, CGT syndicats and Federations were active in trying to forge production agreements between state firms and other enterprises as the basis for French control of certain sectors of strategic interest.

The national interest was a prime concern of the CGT since it considered that only if France had control over

its own industrial structures would it be able to provide a solution to unemployment.

Thus, it was, in sharp contrast to both the CFDT and FO, highly suspicious of any coordination of strategies by EEC countries or, worse, any programme imposed from Brussels which necessarily relegated specific French interests. (The EEC was written off as being under German domination and broadly subservient to US and Japanese interests).

Its proposals invariably stressed the ideas of national industrial coherence (a logique de filière) and the priority of winning back the home market by French enterprises which would mean more jobs and which also entailed higher wages to provide demand.

Thus, the Document d'Orientation for its 42nd Congress in 1985 listed the CGT demands on employment under four main headings:

- 1) Higher salaries to boost consumption in the domestic market - as well as for social justice.

- 2) The creation of new jobs for these same economic and social reasons; and the new jobs should be secure, with a high skill content. The CGT saw no contradiction between the call for more jobs and its support for new technology, since this led to the shedding of labour only because of the priorities of the system into which it was currently being introduced.

- 3) State firms should lead the way in reversing the decline of French industry, in particular through research initiatives and cooperation with smaller firms

at home rather than link-ups with foreign groups.

4) A true modernisation of industry which linked economic and social aims - not the 'modernisations prétextes' or 'restructurations alibi' (Le Peuple, 1169, 9th February 1984) which were simply an excuse for sackings and closing down financially 'unprofitable' but industrially sound units.

The means for all this were at hand:

Il s'agit ... de prélever sur les  
fortunes, de frapper les vrais privilèges. (K)

But it was also necessary to get at the roots of the problem - the financial waste inherent in management practices governed by capitalist criteria.

Public funds, for example, should be granted to companies only if certain commitments on job creation, training and modernisation were made - and the workforce should have some check that they were kept. The same conditions ought also to be attached to loans from state banks.

### Force Ouvrière

Alain Bergounioux, one of the few academics whose interest in FO stretches back beyond its recent electoral successes, outlines what he describes as FO's 'strategy for the crisis' in Kesselman and Groux (1984).

This 'strategy' concentrates almost exclusively on defending purchasing power and safeguarding social

security and other benefits (la protection sociale). To this end, FO aims everywhere to pursue negotiations and come to agreements, even if only minimal advances are on offer: the Confederal leadership engages in highly public visits to the Elysée Palace and Ministries to exert pressure concerning planned government measures or the opening of negotiations; and, finally, FO members are active in the management of the bodies which run the French social security system.

Reading this list of priorities, one is immediately struck by the fact that there are no economic or industrial prescriptions for tackling the jobs crisis: this is really a programme of union action which aims no higher than limiting the effects of the crisis on those still in work and those on the dole.

The CGT and, especially, the CFDT have given much thought to forms of union action - but action aimed at influencing economic and industrial decisions as much as the defence of immediate interests. The difference between FO and its main rivals, of course, is that the former has no projet de société: the trade union should not take industrial action which is aimed at the political arena and, at the risk of losing the independence vital for its primary role of defending workers' interests, it should leave decision-making with the employers and politicians.

There is perhaps a thin line between action to pressurise the decision makers to move in a certain direction and the method recently adopted by the CFDT

and CGT of mobilising behind alternative solutions, but FO doctrine rules out the latter process - or has done until recently. In April 1986, FO put certain proposals to the government relating to unemployment and these were detailed enough for Le Monde's commentator to note that it was "presque un 'plan' complet de lutte contre le chômage" and to talk of "ce changement stratégique" (Le Monde, 4th and 5th April 1986).

The proposals were mainly to do with fiscal changes and training programmes - fairly safe areas to wander into in any first attempt at 'proposition force unionism' - and perhaps more of a tactical move to reopen FO's traditionally good relations with Right wing governments ahead of any move in this direction by the CFDT, but developments in the near future will obviously be of interest.

For the time being, however, FO's approach to economic and industrial matters still seems to be epitomised by the simple, repeated, almost platitudinous contributions of André Bergeron, calling for reflation through higher wages and warning of serious social unrest if he is not heeded (See the frequent leaders by Bergeron in FO Hebdo).

FO leaders do not enjoy the extensive research and back-up staff available to their counterparts in the CGT and CFDT and its analyses of the economic situation are consequently less developed.

According to Bergounioux (1984), it accepts that the crisis is structural and stability can only be

re-established through international cooperation, though it also contends that positive results would ensue from domestic reflation geared towards job creation.

FO opposes protectionism on the grounds that this would cause retaliation which would hit jobs in export industries but, with the CGT, it is hostile to the CFDT's concept of job (and income) sharing and argues for maintained purchasing power and full compensation for any reduced working week. Anything else, at a time when workers were already having trouble making ends meet, was unrealistic and union leaders who expected workers to accept it were indulging in fantasy (FO Hebdo, 1674, 17th June 1981).

FO did not see the shorter working week as an effective economic answer to unemployment: firms needed to remain competitive and acted within a market environment, therefore commitments on jobs linked to purely social measures were always likely to be uncertain. For FO, then, a reduction in working time would only have an impact on employment levels in a context of growth generated by competitive companies. (Report to 15th Congress, 1984, p.269).

Against the CFDT, FO argued that the crisis was not one of over-production as four-fifths of the world currently lived in need (FO Hebdo, 1737, 19th January 1983): a call for growth was not therefore inflationary and there was not some finite demand for labour which consequently had to be redistributed in new forms throughout the work force. For FO, the shorter working

week was a straight demand for better conditions, as many speakers at its 1984 Congress made clear, though it accepted that its introduction needed to be coordinated on a European scale if French productivity was not to be put at a disadvantage (FO Hebdo, 1673, 10th June 1981).

This insistence on growth rather than work sharing as the solution to unemployment clearly put FO in the same economic camp as the CGT, despite the essentially political disagreement on the virtues of European reflation.

The European theme is very strong - Bergeron has called, for example, for conventions collectives Européennes, European collective bargaining (FO Hebdo, 1677, 8th July 1981) and on occasions he seems to advocate a form of political integration via a 'United Nations of Europe' (eg, FO Hebdo, No.1824, 23rd January 1985) or at the very least more commercial and industrial integration. (Joint statements along these lines were issued by the CFTC, CGC and FO in 1981 and 1982).

On the specific matter of employment, the 15th Congress passed a motion which argued that the various measures taken by the government (see the section on le traitement social du chômage) had done all they were likely to do in denting the unemployment figures and that a true programme of job creation was now required, through the following measures:

1) Reflation and investment based on an industrial strategy worked out at a European level, coordinated with the OECD and developing countries.

2) Increased wages to support domestic demand.

3) A shorter working week, by negotiation and with no loss of pay.

4) A programme of job creation in the public sector to improve the quality of services and satisfy needs.

Like all the other Confederations, FO called for an expansion in government training schemes, especially for the young, but it wanted to ensure that there would be real job opportunities at the end of them.

#### The CGC and CFTC

The remaining two Confederations, the CGC and the CFTC, are as limited in their resources (and therefore their research and publications) as FO.

The CGC's views on the way out of crisis bring it fairly close to the 'modernists' in the CFDT, both sharing a concern with the entreprise and arguing for strong contractual relations between employers and trade unions, though the CGC goes further than most in the CFDT with its support for a form of binding contractualism (CGC, 1983: 44).

In line with all the Confederations except the CGT, it is resolutely against protectionism, which fails to address the problem of the failure to modernise and is counter-productive in an open world economy.

Like the CFDT, the CGC sees the need for workers to



be given more responsibility and a greater role in day to day work decisions if an organisation is to be flexible and capable of responding quickly to changes in the business environment. This would satisfy the double aim of increasing worker satisfaction and making jobs more secure.

The CGC shares with the CFTC the demand that workers should be represented on company boards, the conseils de surveillance, to keep a close eye on affairs and have some say in the definition of industrial strategy, though powers of decision should remain with line management. For the CGC, the only way out of crisis is through concertation.

On the specific matter of employment, the CGC was as concerned as the rest that New Technology should be introduced in a way which did not deskill the majority of workers. However, it felt that in the medium term it would be a net creator of jobs with a high skill content and therefore its introduction should be carefully prepared but never impeded.

It urged priority treatment for those groups most affected by unemployment including: an effort to attract the young to industry, in part through revised curricula in schools and a renewal of the apprenticeship system; equal treatment for women in the labour market (which required a change in mentalities as much as the law); a restriction on the redundancy of those aged 45 years and over who might have particular difficulty in finding a new position, or even a system obliging companies to

employ a certain quota of people in this age group.

On the question of temps choisi, the CGC was if anything even more radical than the CFDT, arguing that work was no longer central to life styles even if it remained the main source of income for most people. It argued for the greater acceptance of differentiated working patterns and of career planning which, for example, would allow those who did not go into higher education after school to have the same opportunity at a later stage in life, perhaps with the option of returning to the same employer and even a paid contingent of weeks, months or years which might be dedicated to educational improvement.

It wanted to see an extension of voluntary work which, in its view, provided employment for those with alternative resources and added to services without impinging upon the paid sector.

It was a logical next step to move that the wage be dissociated from the effort expended, to widen out the whole concept of remuneration to take into account individual contributions such as personal effort and responsibility but also social utility. On the other hand, the CGC argued against any ceiling on salaries and especially the CFDT's formula placing it at six times the minimum wage level, rejecting any 'moral' arguments for such an arbitrary range.

In an interview in Le Monde (21st September 1984), CGC leader Paul Marchelli offered an adapted version of 'new-style solidarity' when he said that modernisation

could involve a near-term fall in living standards for all - that is, even those on SMIC (the legal minimum) if society wanted to avoid the problem of a disillusioned and demoralised cadres group...

The CGC was keen on improved training in the workplace and, departing from the CFDT here, advocated in place of a shorter working week

... 45 heures payées 40, à condition que ces 45 heures comportent au moins 10 heures de formation. (CGC, 26th Congress, reported in Liaisons Sociales, Document W207, 12th June 1984). (L)

The Confederation disagreed strongly with government economic policy during the first three years of the Mitterrand presidency and took to the streets on several occasions to protest growing state control in general and the post-1981 nationalisations in particular.

Its macro-economic position was quite close to that of the CFTC which, at its 42nd Congress in November 1984 (see Liaisons Sociales, Document W213, 9th January 1985) denounced the nationalisations as dictated solely by ideology and disastrous in terms of the cost which was not even redeemed by success on the employment front.

Like the CGC, it wanted a disengagement of the state from its overbearing industrial presence. (Its conference slogan was 'Entreprendre Pour L'Homme'...).

While dismissing the shorter working week as a

miracle cure for unemployment, the CFTC saw it as 'inevitable', given the development of technology, but wanted agreements at company level which contained guarantees on purchasing power.

The CFTC was totally in favour of the modernisation effort but conceded that it would entail a net reduction in jobs and it therefore called for reflation through higher wages and increased domestic demand as a stimulant to job creation. It wanted aid for small businesses and a programme of public works which would, as a priority, find employment for those 'ne disposant pas toujours des capacités nécessaires pour s'adapter aux technologies avancées'.

#### The Employment Issue and French Industrial Relations

Sabine Erbès-Seguin (1984), following here some of the 'Regulation' theorists such as Robert Boyer, has suggested that in the foreseeable future the new négociable, the central issue around which industrial relations will be conducted, will be employment. The interest of the flexibility negotiations and of the Confederations' action and programmes for jobs therefore goes much deeper than the actual content: the way in which the unions address this issue is a pointer to how the movement will evolve in the future and what barriers might stand in the way.

In fact, it is not only the evolution of the labour movement which is of interest: as outlined earlier, the patronat has long moved out of its protectionist,

malthusianist torpor of old and has steadily edged towards a form of economic liberalism which includes throwing off what is seen as the heavy hand of the state in its dealings with employees.

In particular, the patronat now seems to encourage firm level negotiations rather than the branch level talks it once preferred. However, this does not mean that it is no longer concerned to keep the unions well away from centres of decision: in stark opposition to Auroux's notion of a strong, responsible labour movement able to negotiate in good faith with the employers, the French patronat seems to be seeking ever more refined ways of evading the unions, hence the proliferation of schemes relating to agreements with 'elected representatives', 'negotiated deregulation', individualised contracts, and so on during the latter phase of the Socialist government. (See, for example, Le Monde, 3rd April 1985).

Of course, the employer cannot evade the union interlocuteur indefinitely, especially given the Auroux obligation to negotiate once a year on wages and conditions. But there is no obligation to conclude an agreement and early results were not encouraging (Le Monde, 28th June 1985). What is more, activists frequently noted that their employer was slow or even totally opposed to giving them all the information they were legally entitled to and which was necessary for any reasoned appraisal of a company's situation.

The good faith of the employers' side was clearly

open to question early in 1985 when the CNPF seemed to, if not sabotage, at least show no real interest in an attempt to negotiate a retraining scheme for the unemployed (Le Monde, 26th June 1985). The strategy then appeared to be to wait for the inevitable Right wing victory in the March 1986 elections and rely on the new government to sweep away 'restrictive' legislation: entrepreneurial freedom would then rapidly allow solution of the employment problem.

Yet the good faith of sections of the labour movement might be just as open to question as the discussion of the flexibility talks and case studies will reveal.

It is the intentions of the CGT which are most in question: yet the attitudes of FO and the CFDT also present barriers to any development of bargaining in the present context. FO is reluctant to venture out of the field of salaries and immediate conditions; more, it clings on to acquis, sharing with the CGT the notion that hard-won advances are not to be bargained away and that progress does not allow such give and take: both these attitudes militate against any effective approach to the question of unemployment.

The problem inside the CFDT is different: a significant number of its militants are still suspicious of négociations à froid, all the more so when its chief advocates seem prepared to jettison significant elements of the programme which has made the Confederation a radical socialist force since the late 1960s.

Notwithstanding the majorities achieved by the CFDT leadership at the 1982 and 1985 conferences for their 'recentred' strategy, the unease of CFDT activists, the conservatism of FO, the maximalism of the CGT and, indeed, the anti-unionism of the employers all mean that the transition to an industrial relations system revolving around negotiation is still some way off in France.

Furthermore, although some observers posited the emergence of a new 'reformist' bloc during the 1981-86 period, and particularly during the flexibility talks when the CFDT, FO, CFTC and CGC frequently held separate caucus meetings, such a thesis needs to be treated with caution. Already, in this present chapter, differing attitudes on the way to tackle unemployment have been uncovered: the divergences should become clearer after discussion of the case studies and the way in which the Confederations evolved towards a form of 'proposition force unionism'.

#### NOTES

1) A filière is a chain of activities from the extraction of materials to the sale of a product.

2) For a comprehensive list of the various measures taken by the government, see Economie et Statistique, 166, May 1984: 35-8. Estimates on job numbers in this section are generally taken from this source.

3) It should also be noted that changes in the way the social security system was operated took 100,000

people off the benefits register between 1982 and 1983.

4) For example, L'Action Economique dans l'Entreprise (1983) and Emploi: Mode d'Emploi (1984).

5) See Lange et al (1982) for union analyses in the post-war period; and 'Vers un autre type de développement', CFDT Aujourd'hui, 30, March-April 1978: 72-87.

#### TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

(A) 'The objective is clear: to put France back to work. And in the first instance halt the rapid increase in unemployment.' (Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy, 15th September 1981).

(B) 'The CFDT puts all its weight behind initiatives to create alternative jobs when new technology is introduced, with the job losses that causes. Experience shows that the search for solutions cannot be limited to the company concerned - it has to cover the whole 'travel to work area' and must involve the active cooperation of everyone concerned.' (CFDT, Syndicalisme Hebdo, December 1984: 18-19).

(C) 'A type of development is overturned, moved in a different direction towards self-managed socialism with each of the thousands of changes of course we are able to impose through our trade union activity.' (CFDT Aujourd'hui, 43, May-June 1980: 82).



(D) 'The shorter working week continues, and must continue more actively to be considered the most important immediate solution to unemployment.'  
(Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2010, 29th March 1984).

(E) 'I would like to say to those who demand the 35 hour week by law with salaries fully maintained and nothing changed in the organisation of work that what they are proposing not only wouldn't create durable jobs but would eventually end up by increasing unemployment, because everyone of you knows, a lot of firms just couldn't survive the shock. Let's not play at being the sorcerer's apprentice with dangerous slogans.' (Edmond Maire, CFDT Congress, June 1985).

(F) 'The funds thus levied do not entail the complete loss of part of the salary: this is a provisional, negotiated transfer of the direct salary in order to make it 'work' for the current priority: jobs.'  
(Syndicalisme Hebdo, December 1984: 18).

(G) '... 'decouple' the notions of 'progress' and 'technical advance', explode the myth of the neutrality of technology and change the criteria which govern the very notion of technical advance in order to really make it a means of progress.' (CFDT, 1977: 10).

(H) 'A new dynamic remains to be set in motion,

based on new modes of social relations and another type of development.' (CFDT, 1984b).

(I) 'The crisis across the capitalist world is in fact the product of the crisis developing in each country from its national base. It influences, in turn, the way the crisis develops in each country.' (Le Peuple, 1192/3, 25th April 1985).

(J) 'The importance of what is at stake in industry today, the scale of the industrial hooliganism done in the name of the criteria of this capitalist management, require that the workers intervene at all levels and all stages of the decision-making process which, in the company, define the strategy and general objectives of production and transform these into concrete ways of obtaining results - that is, in the effective operation of production and in the volume and content of jobs.' (CGT, 1984b: 112).

(K) 'It is a matter of levying taxes on wealth, hitting the real privileges.' (CGT, Document d'Orientation, 42nd Congress).

(L) '... 45 hours paid as if they were 40 - as long as they include at least 10 hours of training.' (CGC, 26th Congress).

## 6. THE EMERGENCE OF 'PROPOSITION FORCE UNIONISM'

The French labour movement as described in the previous chapters has traditionally been, in its majority, 'revolutionary' or 'maximalist' in that it has seen solid gains for the workers as only really possible after a socialist transformation of society. Even the largest 'reformist' union is doctrinally anti-capitalist and sees it as an act of trade union purity to refuse any implication in decision-making, preferring to act as a counterweight to employers and, as necessary, governments.

On the face of it, then, France would not seem to be fertile ground for the emergence of any 'proposition force unionism' - meaning the use of union power to influence the resolution of industrial problems in a positive manner through the elaboration of 'alternative solutions' or 'counter-plans' which are negotiable within the current system but still point in the direction of social transformation (Lange et al, 1982: 61).

However, in this chapter, it will be argued that such an evolution has taken place in France even if progress to date is cautious, faltering and beset with contradictions. Indeed, the move towards practices closer in touch with the day to day concerns of the work force was probably necessary to avoid the marginalisation of traditional combative, or

contestataire, unionism in France and the factors behind this development are outlined.

The next chapter will look at concrete efforts by grassroots activists to influence developments in their companies when job losses have been threatened.

Most attention is focused on the CGT and the CFDT: these are the unions which have pushed reflection furthest and since they tend to be the best represented in most sectors (with over 60 percent of the total of sections syndicales in industrial concerns<sup>'1'</sup>), their policies are of most interest in this field.

#### The Changing Industrial Relations Environment

It is possible to isolate a series of factors in the economic, industrial, social and political fields which contributed, in varying proportions, to the self-analysis of both the CGT and CFDT.

Foremost amongst these was the failure of the Left to win the parliamentary elections of 1978 and, paradoxically, the arrival of a Left government in 1981. However, the rise in unemployment due to the recession, the restructuring of industry and the pace of technological change provided an eminently practical reason for these two Confederations to reassess their attitude to problems in capitalist firms while one aspect of French employers' response to the crisis - a whole panoply of initiatives aimed at making the workforce more productive while locking them into an 'enterprise culture' - spurred an examination by the

unions of changes in the social attitudes of the workers which they had hitherto neglected.

There is a growing body of academic opinion in France which sees the current problems of French industry as a reflection of social as well as economic stresses. The crisis in the mode of capital accumulation is also the crisis of the wage-labour relationship, the rapport salarial, defined as

... l'ensemble des conditions qui régissent l'usage et la reproduction de la force de travail. Ce terme recouvre ainsi l'organisation du procès de travail, le type de polarisation des qualifications, le degré de mobilité de la force de travail, enfin les déterminants de la formation et de l'utilisation du revenu salarial direct, mais aussi les éléments collectifs contribuant au salaire indirect (Boyer, 1984a: 29)<sup>(2)</sup>. (A)

Boyer argues that the limits of the 'fordist' organisation of industry have been reached: it can no longer ensure the rate of profit prevailing in the 1950s and 1960s. In part, this is due to the struggles of workers against conditions in industry, conditions they are no longer prepared to accept in return for monetary compensation. Legislation, the 'social wage' and the opening-up of the French economy to international markets have further increased the pressure on profits.

This type of analysis seems to be accepted to a certain extent by the CFDT leadership and, acknowledging if not welcoming the current situation, it seeks to influence the establishment of a new rapport salarial by, for example, negotiating revised contracts which take economic constraints into account, arguing for reduced but more flexible working hours and moving towards some form of union check on the use of investment funds at both company and regional level.

The CGT has largely adhered to a more orthodox Keynesian reading of the crisis, calling for reflation, a certain amount of protectionism, the defence of purchasing power to provide outlets for goods and services, and so on.

The differences in outlook noted in the previous chapter on the Confederations' programmes for jobs should be kept in mind here as the economic analyses provide a framework for the theoretical thinking of each Confederation on what is possible within the current economic system and therefore the feasibility of 'counter-plans' based on labour movement priorities.

The rise in unemployment from around 1974 led to a rise in the proportion of disputes relating to job loss<sup>(3)</sup> and a change in the nature of some demands (on work time, for example, moving from a concern with longer holidays and a shorter working week for their own sake to action against short time working and then to proposals for reduced hours as part of a programme to

absorb redundancies). (See Casassus, 1980: Ch 1).

The strategy of both the CFDT and the CGT during the early years of the crisis was, of course, overwhelmingly political: the focus was on national issues likely to embarrass the government and the unions staged one day strikes and protest demonstrations to point to the need for a change in the 1978 elections. Yet this form of action promised little in the short term to those workers whose firms were going to the wall and increasingly they sought to preserve their jobs by defensive action, sometimes accompanied by efforts to prove the viability of the company. Essentially, this was

une réponse locale et pragmatique à la  
conjunction d'une situation de crise et d'une  
incapacité du syndicalisme considéré au  
niveau de sa totalité à y faire face (Huiban,  
1981: 40). (B)

The failure of the Union de la Gauche drove home the point for unionists in both the CFDT and the CGT and the attentisme of the period was denounced as the CFDT embarked on a major overhaul of its strategy from 1977-78. Recentrage specifically entailed a greater concern with the preoccupations of the grassroots and action in the workplace (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 1703, 4th May 1978).

Some CGT leaders were arguing along the same lines.

Jean-Louis Moynot (1982), while maintaining that political change was still vital, asserted that until it came the labour movement had to face up to the crisis and propose concrete, negotiable alternatives to the anti-working class policies of the employers. Like the CFDT, he saw the need for greater worker participation in the formulation of policy and union life in general.

When the CGT opened up its press to an unprecedented membership debate on its policy and strategy in the run-up to the 1978 Conference it was clear that many activists also felt the union should look more closely at what the workers wanted and not take their opinions for granted. In his speech to the Grenoble Conference, General Secretary Georges Séguy echoed the criticisms, broaching subjects such as work organisation and deskilling, calling for union initiatives in these 'qualitative' areas and even conceding the lack of union independence in the pre-electoral period (Ross, 1984).

Moynot argued (1982: 58) that the CGT had traditionally been loath to stray far from demands on wages and immediate working conditions:

Implicitement ou explicitement, l'idée la plus répandue dans la CGT est que s'occuper de questions économiques en système capitaliste procède de la collaboration de classes. (C)

Thus, there had previously been little concern with questions of work organisation and technology



beyond the effects that these had on remuneration, health and safety. Moynot - and Edmond Maire for the CFDT, too (for example, in the May 1980 report reproduced in Landier, 1981: Annexe II) - found this all the more deplorable because employers had stepped in to exploit the unions' hesitations and directly address the workers' desires for more autonomy and self-expression in their work.

It is clear that, in this respect at least, one can talk of a conscious management strategy aimed at achieving higher productivity through more flexible use of labour and, indeed, meeting certain individual demands, in the short term at least. Borzeix (1980) has captured well the embarrassment of union activists, caught between what they perceived as class collaboration on one side and the interest of workers on the other (see also Morville, 1985; and the Dourdan seminars published in 1978 and 1982).

The May 1968 events had demonstrated that the young in particular were seeking more from work than wages to satisfy basic needs: old values relating to occupational skills and collective, class concerns were giving way to more individualised desires for self-fulfilment, perhaps even vague notions of 'control', and contestation was more likely to be found now over issues such as the environment, the 'quality of life', women's issues, than in class confrontation located in industry (Touraine et al, 1984; Segrestin et al, 1981). Though the CFDT had adopted the qualitative demands of May 1968 as its own,

it had been sidetracked by the electoralism of the 1974-78 period; meanwhile, Moynot (1979) argued that the CGT had failed to address issues of concern to what he termed the 'mouvement social réel' because its culture did not allow it to conceive of genuine social advance within current political and economic structures.

All these factors pushed the CGT and the CFDT into a period of introspection which focused essentially on the boundaries of 'class' union action under capitalism.'

The debate was at once between the CFDT and CGT and within each Confederation (with contributions from the 'reformists' who largely, however, remained faithful to their previous line). It became more urgent from May 1981 when the labour movement had to decide how far it would go in assisting the PS-PCF government in its efforts to stave off recession, particularly when the economic and industrial problems refused to respond to the mid-1982 change in political direction.

It is clear from the research undertaken that there has been a change of attitude in both the CFDT and CGT as regards their implication in many areas of economic life. The change as far as the CGT and certain elements of the CFDT are concerned may only be at the level of discourse though that itself may reflect the real obstacles to positive working class initiatives in an economy still dominated by the search for profits and capital accumulation. The evolution in attitude is outlined here and concrete examples of the desire to

influence policy are outlined in the next two chapters before an assessment of the significance of this development is attempted.

### The Doctrinal Debate

There has been a continuous debate within the CFDT since its foundation on the strategy for social and political change which revolves around the relationship between short and long-term aims, the play-off between 'current demands' and ideological purity. While still the CFTC, the Confederation at first sought cooperation with employers who shared its christian outlook but, as outlined above, from 1945 in particular there was a steady evolution towards a form of unionism based more on economic and political analysis than moral principle.

In the document on 'democratic planning' adopted by the 1959 Conference there is an emphasis on the need for activists to be trained to formulate policies on wages, working conditions and economic and financial matters but at the same time it is asserted that any ambitions in the field of planning would be misplaced under the current system:

... croire que cela est réalisable sans transformation politique véritable, c'est rêver! (CFDT, 1971: 91). (D)

The resolution adopted at the Conference is unmistakably anti-capitalist: it calls for nationalisation of the

banking system, the 'public control' of investments and an economy based on the satisfaction of needs. And yet there is also a section dealing with power sharing in which the CFTC demands that the union

doit être mis en possibilité réelle d'exercer son contrôle et sa participation à la gestion.

Cela suppose notamment, dans l'immédiat, la reconnaissance du délégué syndical d'entreprise et les moyens d'action nécessaires... (CFDT, 1971: 94. Emphasis added: some immediate prospects for change are clearly envisaged). (E)

In the discussion which follows the presentation of these documents, a lively argument ensues between those who see democratic planning as a step on the way to socialism and those who refuse any integration of the workers into the decision-making system of companies prior to revolutionary change or, at the very least, before the nationalisation of their firms in a mixed economy.

At its 1970 Conference, no doubt influenced by the potentialities revealed by May 1968, the CFDT formally embraced socialism and its position on immediate demands had hardened. It called for autogestion: the social ownership of the means of production and exchange: and democratic planning. But now it is explicitly stated

that:

Ces trois éléments indissociables et complémentaires ne peuvent être réalisés que dans une société socialiste (CFDT, 1971: 131). (F)

'Partial conquests' of an exemplary nature are desirable only within the perspective of 'intermediary objectives' - that is, medium-term goals which develop class consciousness and prepare the conditions for socialist transformation. But any form of cogestion is excluded since it involves unions sanctioning decisions made in reality by the capitalist power. Union demands are alternatives to capitalist choices and negotiations do not imply bargaining over issues that are non-negotiable but rather

... un moyen parmi d'autres de concrétiser un rapport de forces né de l'action... loin de conforter la société capitaliste, (la négociation) doit contribuer à déséquilibrer le système et ouvrir la possibilité d'une nouvelle avancée vers une société socialiste et démocratique (CFDT, 1971: 137). (G)

It was this perspective, with its emphasis on the need for political change, that led the CFDT into its

programme of joint action with the CGT (stimulated in part by active socialists within the CFDT who sought a closer gathering of forces on the Left after Mitterrand's narrow failure to become President in 1974).

Given the different 'currents' within the CFDT, it is perhaps not totally accurate to present the predominance of electoral objectives in the mid-1970s as an aberration in CFDT history (as some of the post-recentreage leadership has argued). However, the CFDT has always sought an independent political voice for itself and, in this, distinguishes itself sharply from the CGT which it sees as totally dominated by the political objectives of the Communist Party. For the CFDT, its rival's reliance on the party political sphere gave it a statist perspective on planning, totally at odds with the CFDT's calls for autogestion, democracy and planning from the base upwards (Maire, 1971).

In fact, the CGT does see the trade unions as having a role in defining the means to achieve socialism, even if the 'essential responsibilities' lie with the parties on the left (Krasucki, 1972). The CGT was not all that far from the CFDT in the early 1970s in seeing little scope for progress under the 'monopoly capitalists and their government': and any victories achieved by the workers were important above all for their contribution to the rapports de force on which depended the prospects for real change, that is, change in the political and economic systems.

There was more disagreement on the content of any future socialism. The CGT argued for nationalised industries run by representatives of the workers, government and consumers: Krasucki (1972) ridiculed the CFDT's vision of 'worker self-management' in the massive industrial concerns of the modern economy. The CFDT, in return, argued that problems to do with alienation and relations with management would not disappear simply with a change in property ownership.

#### The Arrival of the Left Government

The political events of May-June 1981 seemed to open up new possibilities for the unions to influence industrial policy and both the CFDT and CGT appeared ready to make the most of an unexpected opportunity. Thus, Henri Krasucki, at the October 1981 Comité Confédéral National, presented the CGT as an ally and partner of the new government, ambitious but aware of realities, 'des interlocuteurs loyaux, constructifs, sans complaisance' (Le Peuple, 1117, 1st-15th October 1981).

The CFDT was highly enthusiastic over the potential for change and, as it gained a foothold in many ministerial teams, it felt its voice would be heeded by the government. The lack of reserve of the CFDT might seem surprising in view of the recentrage described above. However, the Federation officials cited by Huiban (1981) situate the origins of their reflection on industrial and economic problems in the perspective of a

Left victory in 1978 (and widespread nationalisations). When the Left failed, the CFDT leadership, for all the reasons cited above, pushed ahead with its thinking. In particular, it began to realise that defensive action, sometimes coupled with negotiations on redundancy packages, would not suffice in the context of a prolonged, structural crisis of the type that the post-1974 recession was now seen to be:

Si les travailleurs restent pratiquement absents des processus d'évolution de l'entreprise et des décisions qui sont prises sans agir ni proposer d'alternatives aux choix patronaux, le syndicat ne pourra ensuite que corriger dans le détail leurs effets les plus néfastes (Syndicalisme Hebdo, No.1720, 31st August 1978). (H)

Moynot and a few others in the CGT were arguing the same two points: the union must be prepared to argue and act positively whatever the political context; and to properly look after the workers' interests it needed to begin negotiating upstream of measures affecting the personnel, on industrial and economic policies. Moynot recognised this to be a break with French labour tradition but saw the old attitude as something of a false alternative:

... ou bien se limiter aux seules



revendications sociales et laisser aux patrons et au pouvoir politique la responsabilité complète de leur gestion, ou bien se fier à la vertu d'un programme économique pour résoudre comme par miracle les problèmes qu'on ne pourvient pas à résoudre par la lutte revendicative (1979: 47). (I)

Given the extent of the crisis, Moynot argued, it was suicidal to limit action to salaries, working conditions and defensive fights for jobs. Capitalist policies on investment and products were ruinous for the workers, therefore it was vital for them to intervene.

This line was repulsed by the majority at the time, according to Ross (1984; and in Lange et al, 1982) for reasons related to the political strategy of the PCF (the CGT's positive proposals on steel industry restructuring being abandoned in favour of anti-Davignon activity to aid the PCF in the 1979 elections to the EEC Assembly) but no doubt also because (as Moynot admitted) it was a shock to CGT culture, much too close to collaboration and integration for militants schooled in 'class unionism'.

One CGT official I spoke to in 1985 was still bemoaning the lack of mobilisation by the workers behind such 'counter-plans', blaming that on the residue of an anarcho-syndicalist tradition which labelled any role in management this side of the revolution as class

collaboration. He conceded that most plans were largely the work of full-time officials at the level of the industrial Federations and Confederation headquarters 'où on a le temps de les élaborer'.

It should be noted that this culture is not unique to CGT activists. A CFDT official told me militants were 'unprepared' for the new role but that the Auroux laws were helping to focus minds on industrial and economic spheres. Some CFDT bodies are openly hostile, the Hacuitex Federation<sup>4</sup> placing more hope in political change and national mass action to preserve jobs (see its 'counter-text' to the 1985 Conference Résolution Générale in Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2065, 9th May 1985). The 'oppositional' Union Régionale of Lower Normandy has denounced the Confederation's 'neo-liberal' solutions to the crisis and deplores the abandonment of defensive action at all levels, even if it accepts the need for the unions to elaborate their own proposals in the economic field. (See its 1984 Report: 'Aujourd'hui, quel syndicalisme pour quelle société?'). Like Hacuitex and the CGT, it argues for the state sector to set an example in terms of job maintenance in particular (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2016, 10th May 1984).

In the wake of the controversial Confederation report 'Le Monde Change. Changeons Notre Syndicalisme', the Finance Federation denounced the deviation of Confederation aims, 'le parti-pris d'installation dans le capitalisme', with strikes and other forms of industrial action downgraded to 'un dérapage de la

négociation, voire une forme ringarde d'expression des  
mécontents' (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2016, 10th May 1984).  
(J).

FO, of course, has made it an article of faith not  
to seek any intervention in the running of companies or  
the economy. As a union 'counterweight', it attempts to  
limit the effects of industrial restructuring by  
negotiating redundancy terms (with action undertaken  
where success seems likely or cut-backs unjustified),  
pushing retraining schemes and taking an active role in  
the social security system and so on. A union, it feels,  
has no vocation to manage and therefore it looks for no  
responsibility in decision-making which might blur its  
identity and compromise its ability to defend the  
workers' interests (limited to wages, immediate  
conditions and job security, as far as possible).  
Management decisions must take into account broader  
interests which the union is not there to defend:  
autogestion is denounced for the attempt to reconcile  
the unreconcilable. (See the 15th Conference Report,  
1984, especially the section on 'L'action Économique de  
la Confédération', pp.288-350).

There may be moves towards a more positive attitude  
on these industrial questions by the FO's cadres union  
(Le Monde, 31st May 1985) but all the FO activists I  
spoke to in the course of fieldwork shared the notion  
that this defence of immediate interests was the only  
legitimate area for trade union action in the work  
place. One official at Renault remarked:

Le rôle du syndicalisme est de sentir ce qui peut être sauvé, minimiser la crise et avoir des garanties dans la mesure des possibilités. (K)

For the election of unionists to the board of nationalised companies in 1984, FO stressed its members sought no policy-making role and would seek election only to further demands at this new, higher level of representation. All its candidates in each firm presented an identical 'manifesto' of 'propositions sociales' relating to conditions of employment, with no industrial, financial or management content.

Bergounioux (1975) notes FO's selective reading of the Amiens Charter (especially the omission of the notion of the syndicat as the future 'groupeement de production et de répartition') and the loss of that part of the inter-war CGT tradition from which FO emerged which emphasised the role of the union in national planning and workers' control in the factory. In seeking to distinguish itself from what it saw as the PCF-dominated CGT, FO stressed its non-alignment and a notion of 'pure' unionism which excluded any activity beyond the most basic defensive and revendicatif (at least in the workplace, FO being a champion of the workers' role in the management of the Social Security system).

Bergounioux writes of FO after the schism:

Sa nouvelle position, minoritaire, en butte aux critiques d'idéologies rivales, l'amena à faire des choix, en construisant peu à peu un système doctrinal autour de la notion d'indépendance et en rejetant ce qui avait été une des virtualités du contrôle ouvrier dans la CGT de Jouhaux, la capacité gestionnaire du syndicalisme dans l'entreprise, pour maintenir le syndicat dans une fonction de contrôle au sens stricte du terme (Bergounioux, 1982:69). (L)

The CGC, while not neglecting the defensive and bargaining functions of the trade union, recognises the need to be constructive and offer proposals on industrial and economic matters. (CGC, 1983). However, for some activists there may be a contradiction between this union role and the criticism of management it implies, one noting:

On (le syndicat CGC) fait confiance non seulement à la Direction mais à tout l'encadrement qui fait les enquêtes de marché, qui est compétent (CGC, Renault). (M)

However, others had a conception of the CGC occupying the middle ground and adjudicating in a sense between management and workers, reconciling l'économique

and le social:

La CGC, compte tenu des membres qui sont représentés au sein de cette organisation syndicale, l'encadrement, était la mieux placée pour prétendre à proposer un plan qui soit acceptable et qui soit sérieux (CGC, Chapelle Darblay). (N)

CGC militants alone were considered to have the competence to propose alternatives on the technical side:

Les cadres ont une position privilégiée pour définir une politique cohérente d'adaptation sur de nouveaux produits et avec de nouveaux matériels (CGC, Chapelle Darblay). (O)

#### Unions and Management Practices.

As noted earlier, the FO view on management was until recently largely shared by those unions claiming a class basis for their policies. Borzeix (1984: 225) cites a CGT activist during a union day school as saying:

La production, c'est l'affaire des patrons; l'organisation du travail, c'est pas notre rayon, (P)

a view she notes was widely shared.

Mouriaux (1982: 164-6) cautions against over-simplification: there was mass action against Taylorism in the early years of this century and the CGTU continued to denounce 'Scientific Work Organisation' in the inter-war years. But nonetheless, denunciation - and this was the position until the last decade - was not accompanied by any great reflection on alternatives.

Yet, starting with the revolt by manual workers (OS) in the 1968-75 period, the CGT and CFDT did begin to pay more attention to work organisation, no longer decrying merely the 'capitalist usage' of technology but its very conception, and no longer accepting any consequences of new technology as inevitable or, indeed, necessary in terms of the development of the productive forces but beginning to reflect more deeply on determinist beliefs. When new technology and 'industrial restructuring' began to mean heavy job loss, the need for doctrinal revision became all the more urgent.

The OS disputes and employer initiatives to 'humanise' work (by job enrichment, semi-autonomous work teams, etc) finally prompted the CGT and CFDT to question their attitudes on work organisation and the desirability of changing it within capitalism. Yet both Borzeix (1980) and Groux (1984) contend that the discourse of Federation and Confederation officials had little impact on work place sections and in no sense could one talk of any union 'strategy' on work

organisation which was translated into action.

Where the Federations spoke of work organisation, the workplace representatives concerned themselves more pragmatically with the traditional problem of conditions. For Borzeix, this was partly a question of union culture: addressing the question of work organisation inevitably leads to investment, markets, industrial strategy, matters that unionists were inclined to steer clear of for fear of 'class collaboration' and which therefore they had little or no expertise in.

The contribution of the CGT to the first Dourdan seminar on the division of labour argued that any significant change in work content and 'the place of men in the firm' necessarily implied the questioning of the private ownership of the means of production. But already, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, some CGT officers were arguing that the unions needed to intervene in this and other areas if they were to have any success in defending the workers at a time of profound structural crisis.

Borzeix's research was carried out in 1977-79, just as the debate inside (and between) the various Confederations on these matters got underway. By the time I did my fieldwork, in 1984-5, the 'lag' between grassroots and officials was much less pronounced: many activists in both the CGT and CFDT had assimilated their Confederation's line and saw it as vital to follow 'management' issues and influence them whenever



possible. In no way was this seen as 'taboo' for trade unionists and none admitted to having any reservations, on the grounds of class collaboration, for example - though this is still the reaction of the majority of FO activists (see the 15th Congress Compte rendu sténographique des débats, 1984, especially p.193 and the section on 'new technologies and restructuring', pp.300-304).

The following comments from CGT and CFDT militants were typical:

Il y a toujours eu des contre-propositions faites... Il faut pas se contenter de dire 'non, pas d'accord' (CGT, SKF). (Q)

Ca me gêne pas de faire une proposition à partir du moment où c'est pour créer un emploi ou maintenir un emploi. Qu'est-ce qui est contradictoire là-dedans? (CFDT, Kodak) (R)

On fait des propositions, on aide, si vous voulez, avec la connaissance qu'on a de l'entreprise et des problèmes, avec des besoins qui s'expriment. (CGT, Kodak). (S)

The content of such proposals and the extent to which they signify a real transformation in union

practice is tackled in the succeeding chapters. But the change in discourse is significant and reflects the barrage of union literature inciting activists particularly after the change of government in 1981 to exert a check, a contrôle, on all aspects of company business using the Auroux laws (which were, of course, to a large extent moulded by long-standing union demands).

One CGT activist did not see May 1981 as introducing an altogether radical change in union attitude: rather, it allowed the maturing of a line of reflection begun some time before but which political conditions had not allowed fully to develop:

On a voulu jouer un rôle différent,  
constructif - qu'on ne refusait pas avant,  
d'ailleurs... (CGT, Chapelle Darblay). (T)

Subsequent experience may have led to a revised view of possibilities by CGT activists but it is important to stress here the significance of the political context for the CGT and, indeed, for the CFDT which, for all its recentrage, was no less enthusiastic at the prospects opened up in May 1981. (Compare the headline in CFDT Magazine, 50, May 1981: 'Deux Millions d'Emplois, C'est Possible!').

Jean Brun<sup>(2)</sup>, in L'intervention des Travailleurs sur le Terrain de la Gestion (Le Peuple, 1151, 1st-31st March 1983) equates this 'combat de gestion' with the

'combat de classe'. He asserts that interest in company management grew under Giscard, when the unions attempted to halt the 'casse industrielle'. For Brun, a new, more positive approach is now possible (and indispensable: defensive struggles alone are no longer sufficient) and activists are accepting this line 'after a period of adaptation ...' (The changed climate within nationalised industries in particular is noted by Le Maître and Verwaeye, 1984).

There is thus a new interest in productive potential: products and their markets; the transfer of materials between companies - their pricing and quality; research policy; training schemes; investments; and the means of realising more, and more highly skilled, jobs. It is clear that action and proposals are motivated mainly by the fight to save jobs and - reflecting a preoccupation which became evident in the 1970s (Casassus, 1980) - create jobs, especially in the enlarged state sector.

Gérard Alezard of the CGT's Bureau Confédéral agrees that the

combat pour la gestion est aujourd'hui  
précisément au coeur de la lutte de classe

(Le Peuple, 1144, 16th-30th November 1982). (U)

The CGT advocates 'new criteria of management' which attempt to redefine profitability in a collective context, not setting it up as the motor element in the

value added/capital utilised relationship but affording the surplus needed for further investment the same status as, say, salaries, taxes, rates, national insurance contributions and so on. It thus asks: what is 'profitable' for purchasing power and employment in a locality, for the satisfaction of social needs, for winning back the home market..? (See also Analyses et Documents Economiques, 3, December 1982, pp.60-1: 'Quels critères pour une nouvelle gestion?').

For the CGT, the problem of economic constraints is a problem of the capitalist system: it argues, first, that if employment is situated at the heart of management objectives, then the financial costs of redundancy, early retirement, the closure of industrially sound units and worker unrest (which often total more than actual investment in production) can be avoided and resources better utilised (Analyses et Documents Economiques, 13, December 1984, pp.26-9: 'Pour une autre logique de gestion'); and secondly that waste inherent in the system must be eliminated as a priority - material waste but also the financial 'waste' attributed to the repayment of high interest loans; to the payment of dividends and 'salaries' to non-working relatives in family firms; and speculation, especially on the foreign exchanges (Le Peuple, 1169, 9th February 1984).

It is important to note that action at firm level (and the dossier in Le Peuple, 1170, 22nd February 1984 stresses that 'tout se joue' at this level) is not seen

in isolation: the CGT advocates a 'new form of growth' and each initiative on new criteria within a firm contributes to this.

The more traditional action (on wages, aimed at the company, branch and state) is seen as necessary for general reflation and complementary to the intervention in management.

The CFDT is reproached by the CGT for abandoning bread and butter issues in order to seek a compromise with the patronat over employment (see, for example, CGT, 1984a: 126-7): the onus for moving beyond the recession is put on the workers who must share the present 'pool' of employment and a fixed wage mass. For the CGT, the CFDT, while claiming to want a non-capitalist solution to the crisis, nonetheless accepts the international crisis as a fact that it is pointless fighting against (by, for example, worker initiatives to get their companies to 'Buy French' in order to reconquer the home market with the help of the enforced reduction of 'excessive imports' (CGT, 1984b: 120)).

As noted above, this analysis of the CFDT's position is shared by some CFDT bodies, notably the Union Régionale of Lower Normandy.

In fact, the CFDT of the 1980s is noticeably more pragmatic than the CGT and encourages its members to make proposals on the basis of the market situation of each firm:

Pour la CFDT, il ne saurait y avoir de réponse uniforme pour répondre à la diversité des aspirations et situations (Clause 420, Résolution Générale, 1985 Conference, in Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2065, 9th May 1985). (V)

It has sought to be recognised by employers as a

force de propositions et donc comme un interlocuteur porteur d'une conception des intérêts de l'entreprise. (Clause 452, Résolution Générale, 1985 Conference: emphasis added). (W)

The notion of 'conflictual cooperation' between employer and union in the workplace caused heated debate at the April 1984 Conseil National (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2016, 10th May 1984) and at the 1985 Conference the idea of the enterprise as 'un lieu où s'affrontent des logiques différentes, où s'expriment des intérêts souvent contradictoires' (Clause 410) was accepted in the face of an amendment calling it 'un lieu où s'affrontent des divergences d'intérêt' (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2071, 20th June 1985).

As with the CGT, the number one priority is jobs and the CFDT acts to impose this priority at company and other levels. However, the traditional, full-time, permanent job is no longer the solitary model:

L'existence de deux millions et demi de  
chômeurs, l'impossibilité de retrouver les  
conditions de plein emploi telles qu'elles  
existaient dans la période antérieure de  
croissance, l'aspiration des individus et  
des groupes à une meilleure maîtrise de leur  
temps, nous amènent à définir une conception  
nouvelle et diversifiée de l'emploi (Clause  
120, Résolution Générale, 1985 Conference:  
emphasis added). (X)

Many CFDT aims seem little different from those of  
the CGT (jobs with a higher skill content, modified  
staff-management relations in the workplace, etc) and  
both talk of 'contre-propositions' but differences  
appear in practice, as an examination of the case  
studies will make clear. Nowadays the CFDT tries to  
ensure that its proposals are concrete and negotiable  
and actively seeks to engage employers in 'good faith'  
bargaining: the CGT, by the tone of its discourse as  
well as by the actions it undertakes, still treats its  
proposals as a list of demands to be imposed by force,  
negotiations merely confirming the subsequent rapports  
de force.

Certain CFDT Federations and Regional Unions have  
little faith in the employers' willingness to negotiate  
on anything, let alone industrial policy, and call for  
national mobilisation around unifying issues and  
legislative guarantees to defend workers' interests.

The 'fundamentalist' critics see the Confederation leadership taking a pragmatic path which necessarily relegates central principles such as autogestion, democratic planning and social ownership of industry to mere statements of intent. Another body of critics accepts the need for a re-evaluation of doctrine and policies aimed both at building the union's strength and saving jobs, but the present strategy is not seen to have had great success and there is concern that the failure to support defensive action has impaired the CFDT's credibility.

The 'new solidarities' that Maire has called for (Le Monde, 2nd and 3rd November 1984), seem to put the onus on the workers to accept less secure jobs and no increase in pay rather than on the employers to halt the trend to précarisation.

The debate at the 1985 Conference ended with the chemical workers' Federation and some important Regional Unions (such as Rhône-Alpes) falling in behind Maire (Raybould, 1985a) but, nonetheless, a third of the delegates' votes went against the leadership (and in effect to the 'counter-text' of Hacuítex despite it being widely seen as inadequate and following a political rather than a trade union line).

While the idea of co-gestion is still anathema to the vast majority of French union activists (which, as will become clear, introduces some ambiguity into the notion of 'counter-proposals' with contradictions accentuated by the period of Left government), the need



for the unions to influence industrial policy in a positive way is accepted by most in the CFDT.

The debate is multi-layered, but one important divide is between those who see influence as being most effective at the national political and economic level and those who see developments in the workplace as vital both for the union's standing with the workers and to ensure policies are adapted to specific situations; in the latter group there is a further debate between those who talk of the firm as being an area of 'conflictual co-operation' and those, faithful to class unionism, who go no further than 'conflictual co-existence'.

But outright opposition to 'proposition force unionism' still has a voice inside the Confederation.

Huiban (1981) argues that such opposition is primarily political and reflects the conscious adoption of a 'maximalist' unionism which has political aims rather than the objective severity of conditions in a particular branch. Thus, the CGT and Hacuitex are practically written off by him for failing to see that in the current crisis unions can only survive and employment can only be maintained if unions accept the constraints of the economy (which are not simply a political problem) and mobilise to enforce negotiations on their own positive solutions pointing to a different form of development.

Hacuitex General Secretary Léon Dion is quoted as saying (in April 1981):

Il y a une limite que (Hacuitex) ne veut pas franchir car on pense qu'on doit faire la démonstration des contradictions du système lui-même, et qu'on n'a pas à rentrer dans ses règles du jeu (Huiban, 1981: 115). (Y)

This was still the Hacuitex line in 1985 at the Bordeaux Conference:

La Confédération accepte trop facilement le langage patronal. En fait, elle a abandonné sa stratégie d'action contre le régime capitaliste et fluctue... Il faut lutter contre les licenciements, les heures supplémentaires, il faut mettre la priorité sur les bas salaires. Mais, surtout, il faut remettre en cause le système capitaliste et mobiliser les travailleurs sur la perspective d'un socialisme autogestionnaire (Résumé des interventions des délégués, no.30). (Z)

Yet Fredo Krumnow, formerly leader of Hacuitex and focal point of the (non-gauchiste) Left in the CFDT, has emphasised that this stance was not primarily dictated by ideological factors but by the sheer frustration at never getting employers to negotiate an 'economic agreement' despite a rising tide of closures and redundancies in the sector from as early as 1952. Any reduction of employer prerogatives - and any definition

of 'counter-plans' must entail this - is not negotiable within the current system (CFDT, 1971: 168-9).

This is at the heart of the debate in France: how much is possible through trade union action given current economic and political arrangements? In Britain, commentators generally argue that, while plans must be fought for immediately and can thereby contribute to both political change and the necessary transformation of the labour movement, political support at the national level especially is vital for a successful realisation of their content (Benyon and Wainwright, 1979; Cooley and Wainwright, 1981; Wainwright and Elliott, 1982; Palmer, 1986).

Even in Britain, with its reformist trade union movement, fears of incorporation and complicity in capitalist structures lead to wariness in this field (See the titles listed above plus Samuel, 1985). In France, such fears are elevated into doctrine by FO; they do not deter the CGC nor the CFTC - the latter actively advocates co-management, both call for workers to have seats on the boards of all companies and neither are averse to making positive contributions to management problems in those companies where they have a presence.

#### Types of Union Initiative

An attempt to draw up a typology of union interventions in this field has been made by Huiban (1981) on the basis of enterprise and branch level

initiatives during the 1973-80 period. He distinguishes two forms: the contre-plan Économique (CPE) remains close to the classic mode of French union action - productivist, statist, keynesian in inspiration and pitched at the macroeconomic level as much as the ostensible target, the firm or branch. It involves an effort to

adjoindre une argumentation Économique à un mode d'action classique, polémique et revendicatif. L'objet demeure la satisfaction de revendications sociales d'une part, le positionnement par rapport au système politique d'autre part (Huiban, 1981: 4) (AA)

Huiban's second category, the contre-proposition industrielle (CPI) is more radically innovative: this is an autonomous union initiative aimed at achieving significant alterations in industrial aims and incremental advances in worker control within the present system - changing this system as it proceeds.

(La CPI) constitue, en réaction à une orientation ou à une situation préexistante, la mise en avant d'objectifs et de moyens alternatifs, liés au produit, depuis les conditions de sa fabrication (lieu de production, choix d'investissements et de la technologie, organisation de la production)

jusqu'à la prise en compte de sa  
commercialisation, en liaison avec une  
réflexion sur sa finalité (Ibid: 4-5). (BB)

This categorisation works best (on Huiban's data) at the branch level (steel, cars, aeronautics and textiles/clothing are those studied): here the broad lines of what might be termed a strategy are evident. At the firm level, practices are divergent, less coherent within the same Confederation and therefore less easy to force into analytical categories. The CPI label is here attached to initiatives which have little in common with the radical approach given the same label at branch level.

He divides his forty firm-level cases into:

i) cooperatives - these emerge out of firms that have been badly run but nonetheless have active markets and which are viable given external finance;

ii) the CPI - but here he means little more than attempts at a feasibility study, intended to show that a firm is viable and therefore aimed at the authorities or any likely buyer. No real change in structure, products or work organisation is proposed;

iii) the 'CPI d'entreprise alternative' seriously questions products and production and (usually with Federation support) often tries to situate the firm's recovery in a wider branch context. As in the second category, a buyer is sought but the union tries at the same time to institute new forms of work organisation

and management practices.

Even this last category, however, is seen as a mouvement de lutte as much as an objective in itself: the principal aim is to reconstitute the conditions under which unions can pursue their traditional functions. This will be recalled later in the analysis of the cases studied for this piece of research, for militants sometimes cited this as the main reason for drawing up even the more ambitious plans and this calls into question some of the more lofty ambitions attributed to 'proposition force unionism'.

The use of the CPI term at the level of the firm is confusing and undermines the force of the distinction which seemed to have some validity at branch level. Moreover, Huiban is too quick to equate the CPI with the CFDT (for whom he now works) and the CPE with the CGT. More important, my own research shows that the thinking of both Confederations has evolved during the 1980s.

Under the Left government, branch studies have been made by the unions and 'plans' sometimes drawn up but most emphasis has been put on lower-level activity and the use of the new means provided by the Auroux laws to advance proposals in plants, companies and groups. While the Confederations push certain priorities and these are more or less assimilated by the grassroots, it is less easy to force the plethora of initiatives into a restricted number of categories, as the CFDT concedes, with its acceptance of the 'diversity of aspirations and situations' noted above.

The sincerity of the different initiatives can only be deduced from the statements of the activists involved, but the results of their actions can be used, alongside the evaluation of these results by the workers themselves, to assess the significance of the proposals both in terms of the evolution of French trade unionism and of their success in the field of employment.

This analysis will be attempted after the examples of industrial proposals by syndicats and an example of concrete action at national level (the 1984 'flexibility' negotiations). The present section is concluded with a rapid examination of how the Auroux laws assisted the development of union initiatives in the workplace.

#### Auroux's Contribution to 'Proposition Force Unionism'

Jean Auroux's labour laws aimed to strengthen the rights of workers and unions in the workplace to enable them to become 'actors of change' within industry. The legislation was not revolutionary: in particular, powers of decision in all but very minor matters were left with the employer. On the other hand, the unions were given access to a wider range of information on the general health of their company and the right to be consulted on a variety of matters.

Auroux wanted the unions to be better able to make counter-proposals if they deemed them necessary to the workers' interests.

In turn, there was an explicit desire that employers - presumably through the recommendations of the workers' representatives - would integrate social considerations more closely into their industrial policies (Auroux, 1981; Liaisons Sociales, 1984).

The new legislation has been fully described above. The measures which were particularly helpful to the unions in this field involved those which should have made available a wide range of industrial, financial and technological information and the means to examine it in greater detail through the use of experts and special commissions set up within the CE. All CE members were to receive some form of economics training to assist them in their function.

Similar facilities were made available to the CHSCT to enable detailed examination of any projected changes in the production process involving the organisation of work, products and conditions in general.

The Auroux report suggested giving the CE the right to question the company chief and put motions to the board if certain indicators suggested the company might be in difficulties. The actual Auroux laws contained no such clause but later bankruptcy legislation gave the CE the right to be warned of problems by official auditors and opened up the possibility for it to intervene in advance of the serious problems that contre-plans are normally designed to counter and put the interests of the employees at the centre of any rescue package.



The thrust of the CGT's advice to its activists was to seize on what it saw as the spirit of the legislation and advance demands, pushing the workers' interests at all levels and in all institutions. Thus, even though the CGs were formally set up solely for the imparting of information, the CGT urged its members to respond to the data received with their opinions and proposals on changes (CGT, undated: 57). Similarly, in the GEs, set up according to the law to allow discussion of immediate working conditions and how they might be improved, the CGT advocated widening the debate to cover intervention in general management, calling upon its members to act so that workers had

... vraiment le droit d'intervenir sur tout ce qui a trait au travail, à la production, à la gestion non seulement de leur unité de travail, mais de tout l'établissement, voire de l'entreprise dans la mesure où la plupart de leurs problèmes ne peuvent être isolés de la marche générale (CGT, undated: 18). (CC)

Similarly, the CGT saw the annual right to negotiations on wages and working schedules as an inroad, first, into an area often characterised by unilateral decision but also into the whole field of personnel management which inevitably led to wider

discussions since it was

... étroitement imbriqué dans la gestion  
de l'entreprise et ne peut être traité sans  
qu'entre dans la négociation tout ce qui a  
trait à la vie de l'entreprise: la production  
...les coûts de la production ... les  
investissements, les marchés (CGT,  
undated: 60) (DD)

Competitivity entailed the examination of use of  
capacity, investments and financial costs as well as  
wage costs; and the company could not be seen in  
isolation, either: what management said it could afford  
on wages had to be balanced against what society, the  
national community needed:

... en bref, on mettra en avant de  
nouveaux critères de gestion (CGT, undated:  
65). (EE)

In every type of forum, then, there is the same concern  
to alter the criteria governing industrial development  
under capitalism. It is implicit - and the CGT is at  
pains on several occasions to underline the class nature  
of its unionism - that these recommendations will be  
fought by employers and are therefore in a general sense  
incompatible with prevailing arrangements in industry.

The CFDT's guide to the laws sticks more closely to

the provisions enshrined in the legislation, calling on its members to fully utilise the possibilities of negotiation and discussion to unleash a 'dynamic' that will transform both industrial relations and the relationship of union to worker. Whereas the CGT advocates general means to secure greater intervention in company management, the CFDT is more pragmatic, looking to anchor the union more closely to the workplace and transforming society from there - which is seen as both more democratic and more likely to provide the suppleness required by individual firms in a mixed economy.

On the annual negotiations, for example, it welcomes the possibility of departing from branch agreements to raise lower wages while containing company costs within a fixed overall increase in the wage bill. On working time, too, the possibility of adjusting legal arrangements (as supported by the Confederation in the July 1981 agreement with the CNPF and the 1984 'flexibility' talks) is seen as answering both the wishes of the workers and the specific needs of each company (CFDT, undated: Book Seven, p.23). (The CGT and FO - and to a lesser extent the CFTC - are hostile to any loosening of the legislation in this field).

In its reading of the new laws, the CFDT seems to follow closely the designs of Auroux as set out in the initial report: the increased means and new rights are to be used to make reasoned contributions to the way companies are run, based on the immediate and longer

term interests of the workers.

The results of this approach will be examined in full after the case studies, but it is perhaps appropriate to note here that few if any employers show any inclination to negotiate on industrial strategy with the trade unions. Even as regards the letter of the law, activists complained that information vital to a proper understanding was denied them and it was difficult to tell when an employer was lying by omission. In line with the CNPF's recommendations (CNPF, 1983), employers did as much as they needed to stay within the law, taking care not to set unnecessary precedents or enshrine in plant agreements the intrusive aspects of laws which the employers hoped would be abrogated or diluted by the next government.

Auroux left economic power in the hands of the employers or the top management in state firms who have continued, especially from 1982-3, to be guided by financial as much as industrial criteria. Under these conditions, any counter-plan or alternative industrial proposals which have jobs at their heart are always going to run up against the logic of capital accumulation: if Auroux provided the means to allow unions to present a case in the interests of their members, he did not alter power relations and the dynamic willed by the CFDT in particular failed to materialise. A senior CNPF official told me he considered the CFDT 'daring' for its 'responsabilité de caractère économique' and it has presented some

well-argued cases at company level - but individual employers have refused to contemplate negotiations on this terrain.

#### NOTES

1. 1981 figures: see Liaisons Sociales, N28/5470, 4th April 1984.

2. See also the other works by Boyer listed in the Bibliography plus Coriat (1984 and 1979).

3. The percentage of localised disputes with employment as the central issue rose from 10 pct in 1977 to 29 pct in 1983 (Liaisons Sociales, T1247, 7th June 1984).

4. Hacuitex is the CFDT's clothing and textile workers' Federation.

5. Of the CGT's Institut 'Entreprise et Politique Industrielle', a consultancy firm based at its Montreuil headquarters.

#### TRANSLATED QUOTES

(A) '... all the conditions governing the use and reproduction of the labour force. This term therefore covers the organisation of the labour process; the way skills are graded; the degree of labour force mobility; what determines the make-up of direct income from wages and how it is used; and also the collective elements which go towards the indirect wage.' (Boyer, 1984a: 29).

(B) '... a localised, pragmatic response to an

economic crisis combined with the failure of trade unionism, as then constituted, to tackle it.' (Huiban, 1981: 40).

(C) 'Whether explicitly or not, the idea most common in the CGT is that getting involved in economic questions in the capitalist system means class collaboration.' (Moynot, 1982: 58).

(D) '... anyone who thinks that that is feasible without real political transformation is dreaming!' (CFDT, 1971: 91).

(E) '... must really be in a position to check on and participate in management.

That supposes in particular, and urgently, the recognition of the shop steward and the necessary means of action.' (CFDT, 1971: 94).

(F) 'These three connected and complementary elements can only be realised in a socialist society.' (CFDT, 1971: 131).

(G) '... one of several ways of giving substance to the strength of the workers relative to management after industrial action... Far from fortifying capitalist society, negotiations must play a part in destabilising the system and opening up the possibility of a new advance towards a democratic, socialist society.' (CFDT,

1971: 137).

(H) 'If the workers remain all but absent from the firm's decision-making processes and its development, without acting or offering alternatives to the employers' choices, all the union will be left with is the job of alleviating the worst effects of limited aspects of policies.' (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 1720, 31st August 1978).

(I) '...either limit yourself to simple demands to do with pay and conditions and leave complete responsibility for management in the hands of the bosses and government; or put your trust in the virtues of an economic programme to solve, as if by magic, all the problems you can't solve through industrial action.' (Moynot, 1979, 47).

(J) '... the clear decision to implicate the union in capitalism' (with strikes and other forms of industrial action downgraded to) 'a sort of last resort if negotiations falter, worse, an old-fashioned form of expression typical of the never satisfied.' (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2016, 10th May 1984).

(K) 'The role of trade unionism is to sense what can be saved, minimise the effects of recession and, as far as possible, arrange safeguards.' (FO, Renault).

(L) 'Its new position as a minority grouping exposed to the criticisms of rival ideologies led it to make specific choices, gradually constructing a doctrinal system around the notion of independence, jettisoning on the way something that went without saying in Jouhaux's CGT with its workers' control - the capacity of the union to run the firm - in order to restrict the union to a control function, in the sense of checking, and no more.' (Bergounioux, 1982: 69).

(M) 'Our CGC branch has confidence not only in top management but in all the white collar staff who do the market surveys - they're competent people.' (CGC, Renault).

(N) 'The CGC, given the make-up of this particular union, that is, the managers and professional staff within it, was in the best position to hope to put together a plan that would be both acceptable and serious.' (CGC, Chapelle Darblay).

(O) 'The managerial staff is in a privileged position when it comes to defining a coherent policy for moving into new products and materials.' (CGC, Chapelle Darblay).

(P) 'Production is the bosses' business; work organisation has got nothing to do with us.' (Borzeix, 1984: 225).



(Q) 'We've always made proposals... You can't just say: 'No, we don't agree.' (CGT, SKF).

(R) 'I'm not embarrassed about making proposals when it's with a view to creating or saving a job. Where's the contradiction there?' (CFDT, Kodak).

(S) 'We make proposals, we help out, if you like, with our knowledge of the firm and its problems, with the needs which are being expressed.' (CGT, Kodak).

(T) 'We wanted to play a different, more constructive role - one that we wouldn't have rejected before, by the way.' (CGT, Chapelle Darblay).

(U) '... the struggle over management today is right at the heart of the class struggle.' (Le Peuple, 1144, 16th-30th November 1982).

(V) 'For the CFDT, there can't be any uniform response to the great diversity of aspirations and situations.' (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2065, 9th May 1985).

(W) '... a force capable of making proposals and thus able to bring to discussions its conception of the interests of the company.' (Ibid: emphasis added).

(X) 'The existence of two and a half million

unemployed, the impossibility of getting back to full employment as it existed in the previous period of growth, the aspiration of individuals and groups to a better organisation of their time - all this leads us to define a new, more diversified conception of employment (Ibid: emphasis added).

(Y) 'There's a limit that Hacuitex won't cross because we think that you have to show up the contradictions inherent in the system, not follow its rules.' (Huiban, 1981: 115).

(Z) 'The Confederation is too quick to accept the employers' language. In fact, it has abandoned its strategy of action against the capitalist regime and is indecisive... We must fight redundancies and overtime and give priority to the low paid. But above all, we must take issue with the capitalist system and mobilise the workers behind self-managed socialism.' (Delegates' speeches, No. 30, CFDT Conference 1985).

(AA) '... add on some economic arguments to the classic, polemical mode of action which used to be about simply making demands. The object remains, on the one hand, the satisfaction of these demands, and on the other, the taking up of a position in the political field.' (Huiban, 1981: 4).

(BB) '(The CPI) involves - in reaction to a

pre-existing line or situation - the advancing of alternative objectives and means linked to the product, going from the conditions of its production (place, organisation, choice of investments and technology) right up to its marketing, together with some reflection as to its usefulness.' (Huiban, 1981: 4-5).

(CC) '... really have the right to intervene on everything touching on work, production, the management not only of their department but of the whole plant, or company even, since most of their problems cannot be isolated from the general state of the firm.' (CGT, undated: 18).

(DD) '... one aspect, linked to all the others, of management, one that cannot be dealt with properly unless the negotiations cover everything to do with the life of the company: production, production costs, investments, markets.' (Ibid, 60).

(EE) '... in short, we will put forward new criteria of management.' (Ibid, 65).

## 7. STUDIES OF UNION WORKPLACE INITIATIVES

In the previous chapter, the evolution of trade union thought on industrial strategy and the attitude of trade unionists vis-à-vis the practice of management was outlined. It was noted that the new vocabulary and the innovative démarche of proposing 'alternative solutions' had been adopted by activists at the grassroots, even if certain elements resisted the trend.

This chapter sets out the response of trade unionists to management proposals on job reductions or closures in four troubled firms. Data from these cases will be supplemented by reports of others compiled from the union press and studies by French researchers. An evaluation of the efficacy of this form of action will be made and its significance assessed in terms of the likely future role and behaviour of trade unions.

The four cases I studied at first hand were chosen because, at each, trade unionists had reflected on management proposals, offered alternatives and sought to negotiate on these. These cases do not form a 'representative sample' in any statistical sense but they are indicative of a trend which has characterised French trade union behaviour over the last few years - and particularly since 1981 - and an attempt is made here to locate more clearly the essential features of this trend.

The case of Renault involves discussion of a

management-proposed redundancy scheme which was ultimately rejected. This failure throws light on certain contradictions in the 'proposition force' discourse and, like the failure of the 'flexibility' negotiations related in Chapter 8, highlights the difficulties faced by unions, especially 'revolutionary' unions, in developing strategies to counter mass unemployment which must also answer the needs of their actual membership.

In each of the four cases, the background to the company's problems is sketched, along with management's proposals; the response of the union sections present is then outlined, followed by subsequent developments in the dispute.

Notes and translated quotations appear at the end of each case study.

## 1) KODAK-PATHE

Vincennes, south east of Paris, has been at the heart of the French film and photographic industry since 1907 when the Pathé firm built its 'cit  du film' there to produce film for the cinema, and then for photography and X-Rays. Since 1927 the firm has been a 99.9 percent subsidiary of the world's leading film manufacturer, Eastman Kodak. A research centre sited at Vincennes by Path  in 1920 developed a series of profitable lines for the Kodak group which also has factories at Chalon-sur-Sa ne and Sevran plus smaller processing plants and distribution units in several other French towns.

At its height, the Vincennes site employed around 3,700 people and even at the start of the 1980s, 3,000 different products were being made there. Yet, from 1974, the Eastman Kodak company had begun a thorough reorganisation of its European activities under what was known as the Product Interchange Programme (PIP). The overall aim was to bring down costs by the rationalisation of production: this involved bringing the national units under the control of a European headquarters (based in London); concentrating production so that each line would only be made in one plant; removing 'low-volume' products to the US; and closing less profitable plants. From 1979, with Japanese competition growing and the staple photographic products

market in only slight increase, a further rationalisation programme was put into effect, the integrated European company coming under even more direct control from the US.

It is clear from the business press that Kodak was complacent right through till the mid-1970s, relying on its traditional chemical based photographic products to generate profits and neglecting innovations, notably video, apparently because of high start-up costs. As the competition moved ahead, Kodak tried to catch up, not by developing its own research but by buying up other firms active in the new fields or entering into marketing deals with rivals (Financial Times, January 1st 1984; Fortune, August 22nd 1983).

The 1979 plan involved the closure of the Vincennes site in 1991-2, its activities being taken over for the most part by the Chalon works, Kodak Ltd in the UK and Eastman Kodak in the US.

#### The Union Analysis

The CFDT<sup>(1)</sup> section followed its Confederation's line in seeking a shorter working week as the first response to the company's 'overmanning' claims but alongside this it called for a halt to the run-down in production: the Vincennes factory was a profitable concern with high performance machinery and ending research and manufacturing there made no sense.

Environmental factors cited by the company were not an issue for the CFDT. Noise and effluence levels had

been found acceptable by local authorities and the problems associated with chemical and other inflammable materials had proved slight. While conceding that there was no space at Vincennes to transform and automate the coating tracks to bring them up to the speeds capable at Chalon, both the CGT and CFDT pointed out that management had closed off this option by selling land adjacent to the site. Furthermore, the possibility of making more sophisticated, high value added products on the existing equipment remained. Audio tape had once been produced at Vincennes and research into other magnetic tapes, including video, had been halted despite the promising outlook.

Under the company's plan, most research on new products would be lost to the US and the new Research and Development facilities at Chalon would concentrate only on the enhancement of current products or parts of research projects farmed out from the US. Crucially, the CGT and CFDT claimed, products would no longer be taken from the research stage through to production by any national unit outside the US.

Even more so than with the production transfers, the CFDT argued that there were no 'technological imperatives' behind these moves. The logic was that of a multinational company restructuring for mainly financial reasons:

En fait, il s'agit pour la Direction,  
sous couvert du transfert de fabrications à



Chalon et suivant en cela les directions de l'Eastman Kodak, de spécialiser encore plus Kodak-Pathé dans la fabrication de quelques produits à technologie ancienne. La poursuite de cette politique amènera petit à petit un 'sous-développement' technique, scientifique et technologique qui conduira inéluctablement à transformer Kodak-Pathé en une société de distribution de produits fabriqués par l'Eastman Kodak. (CFDT Kodak Vincennes, Radiographie d'une Restructuration August 1982). (A)

Even in the immediate future, the unions argued, the concentration on a limited number of products would leave Kodak-Pathé more vulnerable at a time of recession. And with the production of triacetate, the base for many sorts of films, and other basic materials concentrated in the US, other national units would be at the mercy of Eastman Kodak's transfer pricing policy.

The CGT section, in a leaflet circulated at a Press Conference on 27th October 1982, pointed out that all this was contrary to the policies of the Mauroy government on industrial and technical renewal, 'reconquering the home market', restoring the balance of payments and bringing down unemployment.

#### Employment at Kodak Vincennes

Under the PIP and the 1979 restructuring plans,

employment at Vincennes dropped from 2,940 in 1975 to 2,410 in 1980, 2,300 in 1983 and stood at around 1,500 when I first visited the site early in 1985.

From 1975, Kodak-Pathé mainly hired workers on fixed term contracts and brought in sub-contractors to fill maintenance and even some production posts. Various early retirement schemes saw 254 people leave Vincennes between 1979 and 1982 (out of a total of 451 for the Kodak-Pathé group).

When the Mauroy government tightened up the conditions under which companies might employ workers on short term contracts, Kodak-Pathé decided to accelerate the run-down of Vincennes, bringing forward the closure date to 1987. In 1982 it announced that 1,500 new jobs were to be created at Chalon, a thousand of these to be filled by employees transferring from Vincennes.

However, this still left around 1,400 of the 1982 work force unaccounted for and a management survey showed that only 20 percent of staff were willing or able to move, 56 percent declining for personal reasons such as the employment of a spouse.

#### The Union Response

Three unions have sections at Kodak Vincennes: the CFDT, the CGT and FO. The CGT and CFDT adopted similar analyses and were prepared throughout to work together to keep the site open. FO, on the other hand, put most effort into trying to negotiate a 'social plan', as required by the 1969 and 1974 national agreements on

procedures when a company plans large scale redundancies<sup>(2)</sup>. This involved searching for alternative jobs for those to be displaced, 'top-ups' for those accepting jobs with lower salaries, early retirement schemes, etc. It also accepted management proposals to set up companies, staffed by those made redundant, to service the Kodak group (by distributing copiers or handling publicity, for example). The other sections saw this as 'delayed redundancy', since the companies had only short term contracts and were therefore high-risk ventures.

FO broadly accepted the company's view of its 'economic constraints' which dictated the closure of Vincennes and sought to limit the effects by negotiating 'social measures':

Plus nous serons nombreux à vouloir négocier un véritable plan social, qui éviterait les licenciements, et à obtenir les améliorations importantes pour ceux d'entre nous qui iront travailler à Chalon, mieux notre rôle de syndicaliste aura été accompli. (FO notice, April 1984). (B)

In this, the FO section was faithful to the style of unionism traditional to its Confederation. In interviews, FO activists maintained that they had managed to improve the conditions under which workers would move to Chalon as well as the provisions made for

those left behind: the company's industrial strategy was something it had neither the means to criticise nor the inclination to intrude upon<sup>(3)</sup>.

The CGT and CFDT felt quite differently: they, too, were working in the best interests of the Kodak workers but their arguments were also bolstered by references to the wider community and indeed the nation.

On estime que Force Ouvrière, ils sont tous pour gérer la fermeture, avec des solutions sociales, et cetera. Nous, on dit que cette solution-là est très mauvaise parce qu'on ne peut pas gérer la fermeture d'une entreprise alors que globalement les difficultés s'accroissent. (CGT, Kodak). (C)

Thus, over and above the cost to the region (Val de Marne was already suffering a haemorrhage of industrial jobs) there was a cost to the national economy involved in the loss of production to another country, not to mention the loss of research potential, skills and 'un savoir-faire commun, cumulé au fil des années', to cite a CGT tract.

There is an obvious clash here between the financial and strategic logic of a transnational company and the logic of union demands which rest on employment and conditions within a national context. This aspect will be tackled when discussing the Kodak workers' international action but first the proposals of the CGT

and CFDT have to be examined.

As outlined above, the analyses of these two sections were broadly similar: the same can be said about their demands and they coordinated their approach on this issue.

In an August 1979 tract the CFDT called for:

i) a shorter working week as the first response to any 'overmanning' which might result from automation;

ii) the return of the manufacture of 'low volume products' such as black and white film which Eastman Kodak had transferred to the US (and which had in fact accounted for 15-20 percent of total production at Vincennes);

iii) the continued production of the triacetate base for films, central to the Vincennes site (Kodak-Pathé was the only producer of this base in the group outside the US);

iv) the introduction of new products such as video and computer tape.

The same points were developed by the CGT and its cadre arm, UGICT, and the call for the manufacture of video tape was to remain at the heart of the joint offensive even as more products were withdrawn from the Vincennes range and the number of workers scaled down.

The video tape proposals were not simply plucked out of the air with the 1980s 'video boom' in mind. The Vincennes research centre had worked on magnetic tape since the 1950s (it was the only Eastman Kodak arm to do

so until 1978) and had worked on video tape from 1977 until 1982 when Kodak-Pathé halted the small scale production which had already got under way (Lebrun, 1983: 103). The CGT argued that there would be no problem selling the tapes in a booming French market and noted that, in 1982, Kodak-Pathé already had potential export orders for the year of 2.5 to three million tapes worth 110 million francs from Philips, Grundig and BBH of Switzerland and these export openings still existed. A French market for around four million blank tapes existed in 1981 and this had risen to 11.96 million in 1983.

The reasons behind the decision to halt video tape manufacture at Vincennes are not clear: Lebrun suggests that the company was looking towards the closure of the site and the start-up of any new production was not desirable. Certainly, it is clear from the business press that a conservative senior management failed to see the impact video would have in the 1980s and by the time it grasped this, the most cost effective way of gaining a slice of the market was buying in the material from the Japanese and marketing it under the Kodak brand. In January 1984 Kodak announced it was to sell a lightweight video camera/recorder manufactured by Matsushita which would use a tape made by TDK (Financial Times, January 5th 1984).

The CGT took the video plan a stage further following the nationalisations put into effect by the Mauroy government in 1981. In its press conference of

October 27th 1982, it advocated a link-up with Rhône Poulenc, later adding Thomson-Brandt to the project, to ensure a wholly French video industry: Rhône Poulenc would supply the terphane or mylar base for the tape which would then be coated and finished at Vincennes. Some investment would be required since the finishing machinery was only capable of turning out 50,000 tapes a month, but the other productive equipment upstream of the finishing process had a capacity of 300,000 tapes. The CGT did not consider this investment any problem for Kodak-Pathé:

La preuve: il parle d'investir un milliard de francs en cinq ans, dont une bonne partie pour liquider l'usine de Vincennes (deux millions de francs, par an, rien que pour démonter le matériel!) (CGT Dossier, June 10th 1983). (D)

For the CGT and the CFDT, the introduction of video tape manufacture would ensure the profitability of the Vincennes site and provided further justification for keeping the highly regarded research facilities intact. The CGT estimated that 200 jobs would be created by the launch of the new line and the remaining jobs at Vincennes would also be safeguarded.

By September 1984<sup>4</sup>, it was talking of 300-400 new jobs, a production run of 10 to 15 million tapes per year and 200 million francs investment. In this

document, the CGT pointed out that Rhône Poulenc already made the base for the tape: it had a deal with the Japanese Tyobo company under which the latter produced the finished video cassettes. The CGT therefore argued for 'une co-opération Franco-Française', better for employment, the trade balance, national independence and therefore economic and social advance. Collaboration with Thomson-Brandt, which produces video recorders and was to launch a new camera with incorporated play-back features in late 1984, would ensure a fully competitive French presence in this market.

Finally, the CGT, in April 1983, also proposed the full production of movie film at Vincennes - at that time, only coating was being done there. This would allow the machinery for making the triacetate base to be fully utilised once more.

#### Union Action

The CGT and CFDT predictably got a frosty reception from management with their proposals. In fact, it soon became clear to them that Kodak-Pathé management had no real power of decision in the matter and that they had to approach Kodak's European management based in London. Yet the company refused to acknowledge the existence of this tier of management and simply referred the union back to local management.

The activists at Vincennes then decided to gather information on the effects of Eastman-Kodak's restructuring on the other national units in Europe. The



Departmental council of Val-de-Marne contacted the Greater London Council, itself concerned at threats to Kodak Ltd's Harrow plant, and they helped to bring together unionists from both sites in Paris in June 1983. At this meeting, the Standing Conference of Kodak European Trade Unions was set up: at subsequent meetings, representatives from Italy were present and interest was shown by Belgian and Irish Kodak workers. However, the German unionists from IGMetall were reluctant to participate because of the presence of the CGT: branded as communist, the CGT is still kept out of the European Trade Union Confederation and ostracised by the American and German unions in particular.

FO unionists attended a London, November 1983, meeting as observers but dropped out subsequently, in part because of FO's commitment to ICEF, the International Federation of Chemical, Energy and General Workers Unions. This body has organised a World Council of Kodak Workers and a similar forum exists under the aegis of FISTAV, the International Federation of Unions of Audiovisual Workers.

Why the need for a third international body of Kodak workers? One CFTD activist said she was all for international bodies that did something - but the ICEF body had not met for years and was ineffective. The FISTAV body was unknown to the activists I spoke to.

The new Standing Conference was obviously closer to the grassroots and aimed at promoting various international initiatives with a view to 'creating the

conditions' under which Eastman Kodak would be obliged to negotiate on technical change, restructuring and employment and give the European companies a fair share of new developments.

The main initiatives appear to have involved signing petitions and presenting them to national managements (January 1984); a meeting with members of the European Parliament (also January 1984); and putting a common list of questions to national managements at the end of 1984 on future markets, investments and restructuring, new processes, employment, and the procedures governing internal price fixing.

The Kodak-Pathé management refused to provide any of this information on the grounds that it was 'strategic'. It should be noted that information of the type sought should be given as a matter of routine to CEs under the Auroux legislation<sup>(8)</sup>. The CFDT activists in particular bemoaned the lack of precision in the laws in defining exactly what the employer was obliged to reveal and the failure of management to comply even when it seemed relatively straightforward. Above all, important decisions concerning employment were invariably taken (presumably, here, by bodies senior to Kodak-Pathé management) without the obligatory prior consultation of the CE.

(On the other hand, both the CGT and CFDT agreed that the extra resources given to the CE under Auroux had, by going towards phone and travel costs, been vital in the effort to forge contacts abroad).

Although the main goal was to force Kodak-Pathé to keep alive the production and research functions of Vincennes, an immediate aim in 1981 was to get management and government representatives around the table to discuss the situation. However, neither the Ministries of Industry, Research, Culture and Communications nor the Planning authorities would intervene on the grounds that Kodak was not seeking public money; it was investing in Chalon; and (at that stage) it was not making people redundant.

Both the CGT and CFDT sections were therefore fairly cynical about the effects of the political changement and tended to play down any idea that they may have had high hopes of a different response from the Ministries:

On pensait bien sur ces questions-là, même en 1981, que ça serait en fonction du rapport de forces. D'ailleurs, la preuve depuis quatre ans... (CGT, Kodak-Pathé) (E)

Notre position - Section Syndicale CFDT - a toujours été à dire: C'est pas parce que la Gauche arrive au pouvoir que tous les problèmes sont réglés, et qu'il faudra toujours pouvoir mobiliser, parce que le patronat sera toujours le patronat, le gouvernement sera toujours le gouvernement, même si c'est de gauche, et c'est aux gens de

mobiliser pour essayer d'avoir quelque chose.

On n'a jamais rêvé par rapport à l'arrivée de la Gauche! (CFDT, Kodak-Pathé). (F)

Such protestations are not surprising. The real lesson to be drawn is, first, that despite the discouraging response of the Ministries, the unionists at Kodak-Pathé persisted with their attempt to have a say in the industrial future of their company. Thus, if the arrival of the Left government nurtured the movement of trade unionists towards the idea of 'counter-proposals' and an incursion onto 'management terrain', that orientation appears to have outlasted the period during which the climate seemed most favourable for it.

Secondly, despite the current leanings of the CFDT leadership towards a contractual policy which would have such matters as one of the elements, there was little feeling here that industrial strategy or any aspect of l'économique as opposed to the traditional union sphere of le social was in any real sense negotiable, let alone a likely area of consensus. Only industrial muscle was liable to alter management's decision.

The activists' scepticism was underpinned by suspicions that a deal had been struck between the company and the government. For a start, Pierre Joxe, a Socialist Minister, was député for the Chalon area where jobs were being created. And a member of the cabinet of the first post-1981 Industry Minister went on to become head of Rhône Poulenc. CFDT activists suspected a deal

whereby Kodak allowed Rhône Poulenc to establish itself in the video tape market unhindered by competition from Kodak-Pathé if the latter was given a free hand in its restructuring...

Thus, underlying attitudes amongst these activists at least were unaltered by the events of 1981 and the adoption of a new démarche, a new way of proceeding, did not signify any fundamental change in their vision of things:

... on se fait pas d'illusions. On sait aujourd'hui qu'on n'a pas changé fondamentalement de régime, de système social, politique... Donc les choses continuent comme avant. On se fait pas d'illusions sur ce qu'on pourrait nous donner à nous mais on sait qu'il faudra l'arracher (CGT, Kodak-Pathé). (G)

The international link-up was not seen by these activists as likely to force a change of direction on management. Rather, it allowed an exchange of ideas and information to provide a clearer picture of global Eastman Kodak strategy.

Les réunions qu'il y a avec les Anglais, c'est bien, parce que ça permet d'avoir des informations. Mais pour faire reculer la Direction, seule la mobilisation du personnel

peut compter, il faut être réaliste. Et on n'est pas parvenu à ce stade-là. (CFDT, Kodak-Pathé). (H)

In fact, the whole notion of trying to maintain national production quotas through international co-operation is ambiguous and may limit the possibilities of united action. In this particular case, co-operation was made possible by the perception that the US mother company was seeking control of all the best products and research at the expense of its European subsidiaries and restricting the autonomy of the latter to that end. A kind of European consciousness was therefore able to emerge in the face of 'American aggression':

Il y a des produits qu'on fait depuis très longtemps et qu'on est en mesure de faire, d'une très bonne qualité. Il n'y a pas de raison qu'on ne les fasse pas... Les Anglais reconnaissent ça. (CGT, Kodak-Pathé). (I)

Again, we see the refusal of the company's logic and an attempt almost to petrify a given international division of labour since the proposed restructuring refused to take into account national industrial and social factors. Both sections shared this rejection of the company logic and used quite similar vocabulary ('refus de gâchis', 'sabotage') more often found in the

CGT than the CFDT press. On the shorter working week, too, the CFDT militants here were closer to the CGT line than their own Confederation's, arguing that no pay cut was justified because of the productivity gains made through new technology and because consumption had to be maintained to preserve jobs.

However, there were some differences of approach. In particular, the CFDT activists did not lay the same stress as the CGT on the Kodak-Rhône Poulenc-Thomson Brandt link-up, one going so far as to describe the CGT enthusiasm as having a 'caractère publicitaire'.

As in other cases, the CGT, while making alternative proposals for the company concerned, widened the focus, citing factors in the national economy and the need for a national audiovisual industry strategy. Casassus, in Casassus et al (1985) refers to this as a 'stratégie d'amplification' and contrasts it with FO's 'stratégie pragmatique' and the CFDT's 'stratégie d'extériorisation'. However, here at least, the CFDT section concentrated mainly on the workers at Vincennes and the fate of the plant itself.

Its members freely - or gladly - described themselves as 'dissidents' within the CFDT though without apparently subscribing to the oppositional line of Hacuitex or Lower Normandy. Nor, like the Poissy Talbot CFDT section which came out against all redundancies during the 1983-84 dispute, was it led by any Trotskyite group. Rather, it was an 'autonomous' group of individuals who had been attracted to the CFDT

in the past because of its democratic and radical nature but who now, somewhat disillusioned, preferred to put more effort into strictly local union and social matters and had virtually withdrawn from Confederation life.

The point is, again, that despite their opposition to the CFDT leadership on such issues as full compensation for the shorter working week and economic policy, they nonetheless felt that the only credible way to fight for jobs in their workplace was by demonstrating to management - and workers - that alternatives to closure did exist and that Eastman Kodak's decisions were not governed by any superior logic passed down from on high. There were other choices and a union needed to demonstrate this by setting out its own proposals and combatting the plans of management not only at a rhetorical level but by reference to concrete data and analysis.

The CGT section worked closely with its Chemical Workers Federation and with UGICT, the CGT's cadres union. In fact, while addressing the problems of Vincennes, the CGT approach did seem to fit a 'pro forma' pattern, especially as regards the rather nationalistic discourse of the proposed 'franco-française' link-up with two state firms which we will see repeated elsewhere. The activists here also followed the Confederation line in seeing the post-1981 nationalisations as flawed because the criteria governing their goals and functioning had not been altered - a sign of a shift in CGT thinking perhaps in



the light of experience: nationalisation is necessary to alter a company's role but not sufficient. 'New criteria of management' are also required and if the activists I spoke to did not use that label, it was clear they had assimilated the voluminous Confederation literature on the matter and had applied it in their firm.

In spite of all their efforts, the run-down at Vincennes continued and the mobilisation of the workforce was weak. The implications of this will be discussed in the conclusion of this chapter and in Chapter 9. We move now to another Val-de-Marne plant where alternatives were suggested, again unsuccessfully, by unionists in their opposition to closure plans.

#### NOTES

1. The details of the section's proposals and actions are taken from interviews, in-house union documents and the national union press.

2. Renegotiation of the main points of these agreements was one of the CNPF demands during the 'flexibility' negotiations discussed in Chapter 8.

3. CGT and CFDT activists described FO as a 'syndicat de la direction'. The Secretary of the FO section was apparently an RPR member of the Vincennes council, which had not opposed the disengagement of Kodak from the town, but at least one of the FO militants I spoke to was a Socialist.

4. In 'La CGT propose une co-opération ... pour la

fabrication française de la vidéo'.

5. The Vredling proposals will presumably require the same sort of information to be given to employees should they ever be ratified in some form by the European Commissioners and Parliament.

#### TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

(A) 'Under the cover of a transfer of manufacturing to Chalon, and following the instructions of Eastman Kodak, management is trying to specialise Kodak-Pathé even further in the production of a few old technology goods. If this policy continues, it will gradually lead to a technical, scientific and technological 'under-development' which will inexorably transform Kodak-Pathé into a firm which merely distributes products made by Eastman Kodak.' (CFDT, August 1982).

(B) 'The more of us there are who want to negotiate a real social plan which avoids redundancies and wins improvements for those wanting to move to Chalon, the better trade unionists we will be.' (FO notice, April 1984).

(C) 'We feel that the people in FO just want to see an orderly closure, with social solutions and so on. We, on the other hand, say that type of solution is very bad - you can't play a part in the closure of a firm when problems are growing in firms all around you.' (CGT, Kodak).

(D) 'The proof: they talk of investing a billion francs over five years, a large portion of that being earmarked for the elimination of the Vincennes factory (two million francs a year just to dismantle the machines!).' (CGT dossier, June 1985).

(E) 'As far as that goes, we thought, even in 1981, that it would all be down to the actual strength of each side, management and workers. And we've been proved right over four years.' (CGT, Kodak).

(F) 'Our position, as a union branch, has always been this: just because you've got a Left government, it doesn't mean problems are immediately solved. You still have to be able to mobilise, because the bosses will always be the bosses, the government will always be the government, even if it's on the Left, and people have to mobilise if they want something. We never had any dreams as far as the Left government was concerned!' (CFDT, Kodak).

(G) '...we're not under any illusions. We know now that we haven't fundamentally changed the regime, the social and political system... So things go on as before. We've got no illusions about what we might get - but we do know we'll have to fight for it.' (CGT, Kodak).

(H) 'The meetings we've been having with the English are good, because they allow us to exchange information. But to make management back down, only the mobilisation of the workforce counts, you've got to be realistic. And we've not managed it.' (CFDT, Kodak).

(I) 'There are some products we've been making for years and we're still capable of making them, to a very high standard. There's no reason why we shouldn't... The English recognise that.' (CGT, Kodak).

(II) SKF

The SKF plant in Ivry used to be something of a CGT stronghold: of the 615 workers employed there when a closure decision was announced in 1983, around 30 percent were CGT members and its candidates polled around 80 percent in workplace elections. (FO had had a presence at the plant and the CFDT was there right until an occupation was begun by the CGT in November 1983).

SKF<sup>(1)</sup> is a Swedish-based company specialising in ball bearings, but also producing steel, machine tools, car and plane parts, etc. A bearings company which had existed in Ivry from 1904 merged with SKF in 1920.

In the early 1970s, the Ivry plant had employed around 2,000 people on three sites: within the SKF group it specialised in the research and initial development of bearings manufacture. It produced mainly small runs, large batch production having been progressively taken over by other SKF factories at Fontenay and St. Cyr.

The SKF group had embarked upon a European wide restructuring because of over-capacity, in large part due to the recession in the car industry (its major customer in France was Peugeot) and cheap imports from Japan, China and the Comecon countries. (SKF was a prime mover behind the EEC anti-dumping agreement with the USSR, Poland and Roumania in 1981 which, however, had little real effect). Extraordinary costs of 274 million kronur were incurred in 1983 due to the restructuring

which affected in particular the French, Italian and German companies in the group (Annual Report, 1983). The express aim was to 'concentrate the resources of each individual company in order to improve their competitive position'.

After forecasting stagnant markets for 1983, SKF finally decided to close the Ivry plant, intending to transfer its functions to its 'two other factories in France. Ivry was chosen, the company said, because of its high costs, including rates; the upkeep of an ageing site; the high wage bill due to the number of employees with long service and the 'hausse régulière et importante des coûts salariaux et avantages sociaux divers'; and excessive absenteeism. It was initially proposed to transfer 98 employees out of the 616 to the other factories and another 160 posts might eventually be created there as a result of work sharing (through state-subsidised contrats de solidarité) and a shorter working week.

#### The CGT Response

The CGT immediately commissioned a report from the SOGEX research bureau, paid for partly out of CE funds.

On the industrial analysis, its report acknowledged the problems with imports and the difficulties in the car industry but nonetheless advanced the hypothesis of a two percent growth in the bearings market for 1984. This was described as a 'natural' growth rate but was in fact dependent on the reversal of the imports trend

noted above, a restriction on Japanese car imports into the EEC, an upturn ('tant attendue') in the world economy and a franc devaluation. In addition, the report pointed out, if SKF managed to recover one percent of the home market - which SOGEX reckoned was feasible - it would increase its sales by 4.24 percent.

If the French operations contributed only 13 percent of SKF sales in Europe, down from 18 percent in 1973, this was not so much due to the high costs of French operations as the restructuring undertaken by SKF. The CGT therefore attached little credence to SKF's promise that it would maintain its overall levels of production in France on its two remaining sites.

#### The Union Proposals

On the basis of this report, the CGT put forward alternative proposals for the Ivry site. The argumentation on the potential market and the other external economic factors seems to have been taken directly from the SOGEX report. Proposals on the manufacturing processes were also made and militants said these were the result of discussions with the workforce but in fact the suggestions appear to differ little from the arrangements existing in 1983.

There was no attempt to suggest new products here - difficult given the highly specialised but limited nature of the Ivry production range.

The CGT therefore concentrated on the financial and personnel aspects of the planned closure and attempted

to rebut SKF's arguments. Crucially, its proposals turned around the 200 million francs the mother company was to inject into SKF-CAM (the French arm of the group) which included 165 millions earmarked for the Ivry closure, 15 million of that for 'voluntary' redundancy payments. This the CGT proposed to use to reduce the debt of SKF-CAM and finance investment to improve productivity, the need for which was fully accepted. A further 200 million franc soft loan would be sought from the government, as envisaged in SKF's own plans.

If Ivry was then kept open, over 150 million francs would be saved on the closure costs: given a hypothetical four percent growth in SKF's market share and an inflation rate of eight percent, SKF-CAM would be producing profits again by 1986, the CGT said. And where SKF's plans involved a total projected loss of 182 million francs in 1983-85, the CGT plan foresaw a loss of just 119 million francs - with Ivry still producing.

According to the CGT, the problem of excess capacity was only partly due to imports from the countries listed above: there was also a problem with imports from within the SKF group, particularly in the range produced at Ivry. (Lorry-loads of such bearings from Italy were 'confiscated' and used as proof by SKF workers in one of the many well-publicised events staged to keep the dispute in the public eye). Therefore, the CGT said, there was a need for the bearings in France and these should be produced at Ivry.

For the CGT, the use to which SKF intended to put



the funds represented 'un énorme gaspillage technique et humain'. Furthermore, the real social cost of the 495 redundancies eventually announced in September 1983 was put much higher than the company's estimate, the CGT claiming that it costs the community 70,000 francs per year in benefits, lost output, taxes and so on for each unemployed person. For the CGT, SKF was disregarding its responsibilities to the community:

... Nous sommes en un temps où les décisions des sociétés ne doivent plus relever de l'arbitraire. Ni même des seuls critères de rentabilité. L'utilité sociale et les coûts sociaux doivent être pris en considération. (Annexe 2 of the Propositions pamphlet). (A)

One of the activists interviewed was particularly indignant at the 'problem' of the higher wage bill due to the proportion of workers with long service. Not only was this a reflection of SKF's refusal to recruit over the years, it was also the callous attitude of a company that had taken the best years of a worker's life and was preparing now to throw him onto the scrapheap along with all his skills and experience.

It was misleading to compare Ivry and the other two sites in other ways, too. For a start, they were covered by different agreements and wages were invariably higher in Paris; in addition, the Ivry workers were well

organised and in the vanguard of all industrial action within SKF-CAM - there was a month-long occupation in March 1982, one of the rash of disputes in France at that time over the way in which the fifth week's holiday was introduced.

This, of course, would provide any company with an excellent reason to shut that particular plant: the 'red belt' of Paris is littered with the hulks of factories whose owners have found cheaper and more pliable labour available in the provinces. The CGT activists here would not even countenance a discussion on the economic and management sense of such a move: for them it was 'scandaleux', 'pas normal', immoral in some sense<sup>(2)</sup>.

Furthermore, the factories in the provinces were more modern and handled large batch production (transferred in part from Ivry) which meant lower costs. Investment in Ivry had been low. Thirteen flexible manufacturing units had been ordered and would have increased Ivry's productivity rate enormously but only five were ever put into use. (I was shown some still in their boxes in the occupied factory in April 1985 - the one trump card the occupiers held).

The lack of investment had also meant deteriorating working conditions, a major factor behind the absenteeism - and a high accident rate which the company made less noise about, the CGT noted. It also hit the quality of production: in fact, even parts known to be faulty were sent out to customers, the union claimed. Finally there was very little investment in

training - and most of that went to the cadres.

SKF Ivry had employed 2,250 workers in 1962: now there were 615. SKF had actively run down the site and was using the results of its own actions to justify closure! Again, this was scandalous for the CGT activists. They conceded that the site was now too large and proposed to sell part of the land for redevelopment by other industrialists. But they maintained that Ivry was still viable. In particular, it had a research and testing centre in which 75 percent of the bearings used in French cars had been developed: since several experienced technicians were unwilling to transfer from the Paris region and some of the equipment was difficult to move, closure would mean the loss of 'l'acquis d'un demi-siècle d'expérience'.

To redress the imbalance in the workforce, the CGT proposed contrats de solidarité, contrats de pré-retraite and contrats formation which, in various state-assisted ways, allowed the older, experienced workers to pass on their 'savoir-faire' while gradually scaling down their own working time and then going into early retirement. (SKF had sought state aid but for early retirement only as part of its closure package).

Productivity could be raised by the 'repatriation' of lines transferred elsewhere within the group, in France or beyond. But the CGT argued that any measurement of productivity had to take into account the research and development function of Ivry which meant that it undertook 'difficult' runs, more costly than

standard batch production.

The CGT proposals included investment in new machinery and training: in each department, the proposals entailed maintained or increased production levels and staffing levels at least as high as before the closure. An end to strict demarcation between grades was acceptable if workers were given the proper training and grading, activists said. Under the heading of 'work organisation', the union made limited suggestions along the lines of workers having the right to intervene in the production process with modifications and proposals on conditions and productivity. (The closure plans had meant that the Auroux laws were never really applied at Ivry).

Finally, the CGT called for a shorter working week to create new jobs and an increase in wages to motivate the workers and, on a wider scale, stimulate the economy.

#### Union Action

Predictably, SKF rejected the proposals which the CGT subsequently took to local, departmental and national authorities. To prevent the transfer of machinery as the closure date approached, CGT members occupied the Ivry factory in November 1983. The occupation was to continue for 18 months and various stunts kept the dispute in the public eye. Seventy local organisations and the Communist-led council supported the workforce and chartered a plane to fly a delegation

to Gothenburg in Sweden to attempt to talk to SKF group leadership and also to discuss their case with local unionists. The latter initiative does not seem to have had any tangible result.

When I visited Ivry in April 1985 there were no more than sixty workers still involved with the occupation. They had survived that long mainly due to the assistance of the council.

Ivry is a Communist stronghold: in the 1983 council elections, the PCF-led Left list got 77 percent of the vote. The SKF plant there was a CGT bastion. Both these factors probably played a part in SKF's decision to close this plant rather than one of the two outside the Paris conurbation. That decision may, then, have been broadly political though a heavy rates bill no doubt contributed, too. For the council, the closure of SKF meant the annual loss of nine million francs in rates and related charges (Ivry Ma Ville, No.113, May 1983). A further 1,500 jobs were under threat in the town at the time of the SKF closure.

The chances of the remaining sixty salvaging anything from the occupation by April 1985 were remote. The CGT had progressively scaled down its proposals as the available workforce shrank and at various points during the dispute alternative projects for the site were discussed by SKF, union and council officials but no agreement was ever reached. (One scheme involving a laboratory for rubber research and certain services of the SITA and Total groups would have created around 200

jobs).

By 1985 it was clear that the symbolic and political aspects of the dispute were of more importance than any industrial plan. This does not seem to have been the case at the start. The local activists put a great deal of effort into drawing up their initial proposals and the CGT's Metalworkers Federation was also intent on making its opinions felt as to the need for a strong French bearings industry<sup>(3)</sup>.

Yet, despite the dwindling band of occupiers, the CGT press and the PCF daily, L'Humanité, continued to publicise the dispute. Mobilisation elsewhere was slow and this lengthy occupation (in the town where Thorez was for many years député) was seized upon as a vivid symbol of the workers' right to employment.

Finally, on May 28th 1985, fully 18 months after the tribunal d'instance had ordered the evacuation of the plant, 240 riot police moved in, easily overcoming the two or three people who had spent the night there. Throughout the day, skirmishes took place in the streets surrounding the factory.

The reaction of the CGT and PCF was interesting and provides an instructive comparison with attitudes expressed earlier in the dispute. Thus, in the April 1984 issue of Ivry Ma Ville, Patrick Oinard (SKF worker and PCF Councillor) had stated:

Toutes les études concluent sur les  
possibilités, la viabilité des solutions

proposés par la CGT. Il s'agit bien pour la SKF d'une volonté politique de casser l'usine d'Ivry qui s'inscrit dans la démarche de sabotage économique du patronat et de la droite de désindustrialiser la région parisienne. (B)

On the expulsion of the SKF occupiers, however, it was the government that was deemed the guilty party. Jean-Pierre Page of the Union Départementale declared:

En agressant les travailleurs de la SKF, le gouvernement, le chef de l'Etat lui-même, renouent avec les pratiques anti-ouvrières des précédents gouvernements socialistes. (L'Humanité, May 29th, 1985). (C)

The CGT magazine, La Vie Ouvrière, (2127, 3rd-9th June 1985) squarely situated the government in the same camp as the patronat in an article detailing examples of employer aggression against unionists.

The tendency to attack the government for the shake-out in industry had begun well before the Communist Party declined to sit in the Fabius government in the middle of 1984 but the volume was increased after that, causing some disquiet among the Socialists in the CGT.

What happened next at Ivry underlined the symbolic aspect of the dispute. The company had already evacuated

some of its machinery when, in the early hours of June 5th, a 'commando' group broke into the works and in the resulting bloody battle scores were injured. The next day, L'Humanité had pictures covering its front page and the editorial likened the events to 1947 when the Socialist Jules Moch sent tanks into the mining areas.

That comparison is illuminating on two counts. First, it draws a parallel with a previous period of open hostility between the Socialists and Communists when the CGT abruptly dropped its post-war exhortations to the workers to toil to rebuild the economy and began to mobilise behind calls to improve wages. A similar slide from soutien critique to outright opposition had also occurred now. Of course, in both cases, the CGT could point to real grievances to support its change of attitude but the ultimate futility of the SKF episode suggests that this fight at least was more about party politics than industry.

This leads on to the second point: the strike wave of 1947 was perhaps a failure but it was a mass phenomenon: the SKF battle, for all the column inches it generated, was a one-off affair and should be set against the signal failure of the CGT to truly mobilise the workers against job losses in much more serious cases - Renault, for example. Rather than a sign of its virility, the SKF episode might better be portrayed as a symbol of the CGT's decline over the thirty years since the Moch intervention.

What is more - and this serves to underline both the



above points - the June 5th raid was apparently organised by the PCF and for the most part involved its members and employees from the Communist Councils in the region. Of the 68 people arrested in Ivry that day, only one was an SKF worker (Le Monde, June 7th 1985). Even Henri Krasucki was not let into the secret until late on June 4th and André Sainjon, General Secretary of the CGT's Metalworkers Federation, was kept in total ignorance (Le Nouvel Observateur, 1075, 14th-20th June 1985). Both these men are leading Communists and so, at a different political level, the SKF battle can also be seen as an episode in the fractional battle between those Communists in the CGT seeking to bring their union solidly out against the Socialist government (and therefore on the side of the PCF) and the more cautious PCF members who recognised the threat that this posed to unity within the Confederation.

### 'Incompréhension Mutuelle'

All this has taken us some way from the notion of 'alternative plans': in this case, as the local syndicat came up against a management determined to push ahead with its own plan, workers drifted away from the plant to other jobs or the resignation of the dole queue and the dispute was kept alive as a symbolic reminder of the failings of the Socialist government in the fields of industry and employment. Symbolic, too, perhaps, of the passing of the type of industrial unit from which the CGT drew its strength and which has suffered

inordinately during the present crisis.

As at Kodak, the union was faced with a transnational company with the financial resources to implement its restructuring despite the irritation of machinery being impounded by the workers over a long period. Ultimately, whatever means a union has access to and whatever rights the law gives it, the impact of workers' plans will always depend on the willingness of employers and managers to discuss them. Even under a Left government, and even in nationalised firms, as we will see in the case of Renault, company leaders are still hostile to any worker input in an area seen as their prerogative.

The SKF plan did have merits - the concern with the local economy, the desire to see skills passed on to the next generation, the dismay at the waste of human, material and technical resources - but, as with Kodak, the union logic ran counter to the logic of SKF, notably over the question of finance.

SKF was quite prepared to transfer 200 million francs to close Ivry, to reduce what it saw - from the point of view of its group operations - as excess production in France and close a low performance unit. The CGT, on the other hand, wanted to use that money to invest in Ivry, subsidise the losses in the short term and invest with a view to achieving medium and long-term profitability. As elsewhere, the union tried to argue for cross-subsidisation and the inclusion of social criteria in determining the uses to which capital is

put: the financial constraints felt by the SKF group are largely ignored.

The market forecast of each side is a case study in the use of statistics - the CGT using fairly optimistic figures from the Chamber of Commerce and Employers' organisations at precise moments in time, SKF using zero growth forecasts to justify its closure decision to the labour authorities but noticeably more bullish not long after the redundancies had been given the go-ahead.

As in other cases, the CGT criticised management for seeing the downturn in its markets and its market share as fact, fatalités, and therefore irreversible. It countered by urging SKF to seek out new markets - TGV trains, aeronautics, new models of car, and so on - in the general belief that growth can be stimulated given the right political will, therefore there is no justification in closing down plants which have working equipment, which only need investment and the elimination of 'unfair competition' to make them viable.

However, irrespective of the market, the financial element alone was enough to sink the CGT plan under the current economic system. SKF-CAM management described the proposals as requiring a 'miracle' and in capitalist terms the CGT is indeed asking for a 'gift' of 200 million francs from SKF, free finance. It is clear from the minutes of the CE meeting of October 12th 1983 that on this issue there was a real dialogue de sourds, 'un constat d'incompréhension mutuelle' as those minutes put it.

This important financial aspect resurfaces in the following case which also involved the lengthy occupation of a factory by the CGT.

#### NOTES

1. Information is drawn from interviews with union activists and a member of the town's Service des Activités Economiques; and the pamphlet Propositions du Syndicat CGT pour le maintien et le développement de l'établissement SKF Ivry, which includes excerpts from the company's own plan and the SOGEX report.

2. A genuine scandal broke out when the workers occupied the factory and found files on their political views and personal lives. According to one older militant, this touched a particularly raw nerve as the company had denounced trade union activists to the Germans during the Second World War.

3. CGT-FGM: Points de repère et éléments de propositions pour assurer une relance et un développement du secteur français du roulement. (Roneotyped document, October 1983).

#### TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

(A) 'We live in an age when decisions in society should no longer be made arbitrarily. Nor on the basis of profitability alone. Social usefulness and social costs must be taken into consideration.' (Annexe 2 of the Propositions pamphlet).

(B) 'All the studies agree on the possibilities opened up, the viability of the solutions proposed by the CGT. With SKF, there is a political motive for smashing the Ivry factory which fits in with the strategy of economic sabotage of the bosses and the Right, and the deindustrialisation of the Paris region.' (Ivry Ma Ville, April 1984).

(C) 'By attacking the workers of SKF, the government and the Head of State himself are adopting the anti-working class practices of previous Socialist governments.' (L'Humanité, May 29th 1985).

### (III) CHAPELLE DARBLAY

The paper-making company of Chapelle Darblay went into receivership in December 1980. Since at the time it produced around 80 percent of all paper made in France (covering around 42 percent of the country's needs) and employed some 2,360 people in the two of its plants situated in the Rouen region, it attracted a great deal of publicity.

In 1980, the group was jointly owned by a public industrial finance body, the Institut Pour le Développement Industriel (IDI), and the private bank Paribas<sup>41</sup>. The company had grown in the 1960s and 1970s after a series of mergers pushed through with the aim, firstly, of establishing a paper manufacturer large enough to compete with the North American and European giants; and, secondly, to provide Chapelle Darblay with its own distribution units and some capacity for supplying the raw materials it needed.

However, 30 percent of raw materials were still imported (and paid for in dollars) and energy costs in the industry were high. Furthermore, it was a capital intensive industry: by the end of the 1970s investment had been squeezed (a CGT activist claimed that the Darblay family which had controlled the group till the mid-1970s had invested elsewhere for a quicker return on capital - in the toy industry, for example - and machinery in the Rouen plants was largely outdated).

Ironically, investment of 114 million francs in 1978-9, mostly in a completely new paper-making machine (taking up the whole of a 2-1/2 acre factory) probably pushed the company over the brink as it coincided with a serious increase in production and material costs (fuel, for example, rose by 106 percent with the second 'oil shock') which were already high, especially in comparison with Canadian competitors. The company also had to face an unexpected downturn in the market for lightweight coated paper, used for magazines and certain books (though its major product was newsprint).

For a long time, problems had been masked to some extent by the existence of an effective state subsidy for paper<sup>(2)</sup>. However, after making a modest profit of 27.1 million francs (out of a turnover of 1.7 billion) in 1979, the company called in the receiver in December 1980, burdened by debts of 1.1 billion francs.

Under French law, the company was allowed to carry on producing while the various legal and state authorities sought to come up with a plan for finance. Since French operators were unwilling to invest in Chapelle Darblay, the Industry Ministry called upon the Dutch paper company, Parenco, which had recently pushed through its own modernisation, to draw up and oversee a recovery plan.

This first Parenco plan in early 1983 aimed, over five years, to restore Chapelle Darblay to international competitiveness in the newsprint market that it was henceforth to concentrate upon, to the exclusion of

other products. It entailed making greater use of French resources, with investments in equipment more suitable for French timber and machinery for recycling paper. A move to thermo-chemical (rather than mechanical) paper-making would commence with the commissioning of a brand new machine. Total investment in 1983 would amount to 1.2 billion francs, most of that coming from the state.

When the plan was put forward, there were 2,031 employees left in the Rouen plants: around 1,450 would lose their jobs under the plan, 600 immediately and the rest in 1987-8. All that was proposed for these were vague retraining schemes.

### The Union Response

Three sections (CGT, CFDT, CGC) existed in each of the Chapelle Darblay plants at St. Etienne-du-Rouvray and Grand Couronne, with the CGT particularly strong in the former: it had 75 percent of the vote in the workers' college and 40 percent among the foremen and cadres (where it was up against a combined CFDT-CGC ticket) in the 1985 DP elections.

The CFDT commissioned a report by the TEN research bureau in March 1982. The report stressed the need to bring down costs into line with competitors: it found that the development of the company was dependent on newsprint production, other products having little realistic chance of expanding sales though their



continued production was deemed necessary to maintain the maximum number of jobs. A 'radical transformation' in working practices was also necessary to provide suppleness in labour management.

The CFDT Union Régionale, which took the lead in the CFDT response and somewhat eclipsed the role of the local sections, drew on these findings for its own proposals. It was particularly concerned with the impact of any large-scale job losses on the local economy and had strongly opposed the indifference of the pre-1981 government.

So, while Parenco's plan would keep alive the traditional paper-making industry in the Rouen area, the CFDT deplored both the job losses per se and the failure of the plan to address the needs of those displaced. On the industrial side, it questioned the abandonment of all products other than newsprint and the lack of will to go for a greater share of the home market, which it felt was feasible with the proper investment.

The CFDT's proposals, however, seem to accept the Parenco plan as the best option available and complement rather than oppose its central features. In particular, Chapelle Darblay itself does not occupy the central place that it has in the CGT's proposals and the emphasis is put on local and regional development to build on the solid base of a slimmed-down and profitable paper business.

Thus, the CFDT suggested the setting up of an 'industrial mission', with representatives of unions,

employers, local and national authorities. The mission would have funds (presumably from the local authorities and government) to encourage and co-ordinate new investment in the Rouen area, particularly in sectors related to paper - the exploitation of local timber resources, the collection of paper to recycle, businesses to take up the production of types of paper abandoned by Parenco - but also small engineering businesses to work on aspects of the modernisation of old enterprises and ventures in which the skills of those who lost their jobs at Chapelle Darblay could be put to use.

Since the government was putting up most of the funding for the restructuring of Chapelle Darblay anyway, the CFDT argued that social costs should be integrated within the financial and industrial project of Parenco. It demanded that there should be no redundancies without, first, a 'massive' reduction in the working week and then the offer of alternative employment to all those still surplus to requirements.

Overall, the sectoral and craft emphasis of the CGT's stance is displaced here by an emphasis on the local economy. This no doubt reflects the fact that the CFDT's proposals, while naturally receiving some input from its sections in the plants, were largely drawn up by its regional body in Rouen. However, the programme was not accepted by all the CFDT members at Chapelle Darblay, some siding with the CGT, at least until the latter's decision to stage an occupation.

In particular, some CFDT members found themselves unable to accept their Union Régionale's analysis that protectionism in the paper industry, as well as allowing the sector to grow and provide above average wages and conditions, had also sowed the seeds of its failure to be competitive on the international market and therefore had to be dispensed with.

It was much easier for the grassroots activists to identify with the CGT's demands, with their emphasis on the maintenance of conditions won through years of struggle and the continuation of protectionist policies until the national industry was nurtured back to health.

The CGT line, familiar from the other cases already discussed, was that the Parenco plan was based on a short-term view of profitability which, in reducing output and employment rather than tackling the problem of imports, destroyed a sound industrial unit. Again, the CGT emphasised the national and social implications of the local problem, demanding:

...nouveaux critères de gestion qui lient  
étroitement objectifs de relance économique  
et progrès social. (Oswald Calvetti of the  
Commission Exécutive at a press conference on  
Chapelle Darblay, 30th June 1983). (A)

So, while on the one hand the CGT's proposals were more clearly centred on the maintenance of Chapelle Darblay as an industrial entity than those of the CFDT,

there was also a national line of reasoning not taken up by the CFDT literature or activists (though, of course, it shared the latter's concern for the regional impact of the proposed job losses). Thus, the CGT highlighted the effect on the trade balance of running down production in an essential material and the need for a certain national independence in the supply of paper, vital for education, culture and information.

The CGT entitled its proposals for Chapelle Darblay 'Un Plan Franco-Français Pour Chapelle Darblay'. It was drawn up by the CGT sections, cadres from within the company and elsewhere in the industry, and a research group, GERENCE (Groupe d'Etude et de Recherche dans l'Elaboration de Nouveaux Critères d'Efficacité).

The stated aim was to provide investment capital to increase production and cover national needs as far as possible, safeguarding the maximum number of jobs in the process. This was seen as essentially a matter of political will:

Les moyens peuvent être dégagés, le coût social de la casse de Chapelle Darblay exprimé en valeur représente plus que les sommes nécessaires à investir pour rentabiliser les productions qui seraient abandonnées par la mise en oeuvre du Plan Parenco. (Presentation Générale du Plan Franco-Français).

The funds wasted on social security, 'top-up' payments for those transferring to external, lower-paid jobs and various 'retraining' schemes, plus the state aid to the local councils affected by loss of rate income and so on, ought to be used to subsidise production and jobs, the CGT implied: this would avoid not only the damage to the trade figures but also the ravages inflicted on the social fabric of the region.

For the CGT, French groups had refused to undertake any joint venture with Chapelle Darblay out of a barely concealed desire to see it fail, for commercial reasons (they wanted to take over the non-newsprint products) but also for political reasons:

...mettre bas un bastion de la gauche,  
une entreprise phare dans la profession et la  
région au vue (sic) des conquêtes sociales  
obtenues par la lutte des travailleurs avec  
leurs puissants syndicats CGT. (Présentation  
Générale du Plan Franco-Français).

The subsequent choice of Parenco reflected the government's acceptance of the role of Brussels in carving out a European restructuring of the paper industry according to CGT activists.

In contrast, the CGT's plan involved calling upon the help of an important French paper company, Cellulose du Pin, a unit of the nationalised Saint Gobain company: in fact, since 1980 the CGT had been demanding the

nationalisation of Chapelle Darblay itself. Its calls got louder as the company kept going with public funds and as it became clear that Parenco would only be bringing 'expertise', not its own funds, into the restructuring operation.

The CGT's industrial proposals recognised the need to reduce costs (one CGT activist here offered the comment that there was indeed a role for competition in stimulating production and responding to needs - a perspective rare in the CGT, all the more so in a protected industry) but reckoned this could be done by the introduction of new machinery and a cheaper supply of raw materials.

Like the CFDT, the CGT proposed adaptations to use recycled paper and timber from the region. Again like the CFDT, it queried the strategy of producing only newsprint which was likely to leave the company highly vulnerable to any market downturn and furthermore argued for increased production to bring economies of scale. (The TEN report made the same point).

Unlike the CFDT, the CGT wanted the production of other types of paper to be retained within Chapelle Darblay to achieve similar savings on costs. Both unions looked at the European market in paper for magazines, books and other printed material but whereas the CGT saw potential for development (there was apparently no question of protectionism here!), the CFDT reckoned that production of only some of these different types of paper might be increased and it was pessimistic about

Chapelle Darblay's chances of increasing its market share given the stiff competition.

The CGT's plan retained all the 'positive' investments detailed in the Parengo plan (that is, those which went into modernising machinery for thermo-chemical production, creating a capacity for recycling paper, and so on) and added suggestions for other improvements to machinery, costing at 420 million francs. Total investment needed: "1.6 billion francs...

The CGT argued for the continuation of production on both sites and the CFDT tended to agree that running down Grand Couronne prior to the start of production on a new machine at St. Etienne which was scheduled to take over its capacity was a strategic error which would alienate customers and see skilled workers drift away even before their projected redundancy dates. Investments at Grand Couronne would cost less than closure and the CGT said it could be run profitably with the non-newsprint products.

On the other hand, the CGT plan made no mention at all of the size of the workforce: the presentation of the plan talks only of a 'satisfactory resolution' to the problem, 'unlike in the Parengo plan'. Subsequent events were to show that the CGT rejected all the redundancies - and this aspect of production costs was totally absent in its proposals.

The CGC at Chapelle Darblay also came up with proposals although the members I interviewed at the St.

Etienne plant were unable, or unwilling, to show me a copy. They insisted that their proposals formed the basis of the CGT Plan Franco-Français though they also included figures on manning levels. They had taken the line that their proposals would carry more weight with the Industry Minister and the workforce if presented through the CGT. (For their part, CGT activists acknowledged the help of Chapelle Darblay cadres but not of CGC members, as such).

The CGC accepted the need for the first wave of redundancies proposed by Parenco but, like the other sections, rejected the later job losses as unnecessary since there were markets for the high value added products to be abandoned along with the Grand Couronne site.

#### The Fight Against the First Parenco Plan

The Parenco plan was presented in May 1983 and immediately the CGT and CFDT began to lobby the government against the massive job losses. In July, the Industry Ministry agreed to fund an 'industrial mission' as demanded by the CFDT, with the brief of stimulating local investment to provide jobs for those to be made redundant. In addition, the Ministry agreed to look at a proposal that Chapelle Darblay continue production of non-newsprint paper for a time, as long as the market and profitability did not deteriorate.

The CFDT and CGC broadly accepted this approach but the CGT demanded more than promises and 'studies': it



wanted guarantees for the Grand Couronne site and the workers who were to lose their jobs. And it was still arguing for a French solution, all the more so since Parenco had now been taken over by the German firm, Haindl, which was unenthusiastic about the whole scheme. Consequently, the former head of Parenco, the Canadian John Kila, was put in charge of the restructuring in a personal capacity and a lucrative contract for technical assistance was given to Parenco."

Kila brought just one million francs of new capital to the business - a figure matched by both Paribas and IDI but, due to a complicated structure involving layers of holding companies, Kila actually had a 51 percent stake in the new Chapelle Darblay company (L'Express, 3rd February 1984; and Chapelle Darblay documentation).

Three local councils (all PCF-led), which stood to lose rate income and faced the burden of supporting the unemployed workers, backed the CGT stand, as did 18,255 of the local population in a local referendum. (A similar test of opinion - which stood little chance of failing, given the self-selection of those likely to vote - was also staged by the SKF workers in Ivry).

At the beginning of September 1983, the CGT occupied the two factories of Grand Couronne and St. Etienne-du-Rouvray. The management had decided to halt production to reorganise shifts and equipment: the CGT subsequently restarted the machinery with the help of retired technicians and perhaps even some cadres from outside the company (Vie Ouvrière, 2037, 12th-18th

September 1983; Le Monde, 4th-5th September 1983). Production continued sporadically during the occupation despite a fire and an accident (caused by incompetence according to CGC activists, sabotage after an 'open day' according to the CGT).

The other unions were apparently kept out by the CGT though they both disagreed with the occupation anyway. On 17th October, a group of armed men (including, according to CGT activists, police in civilian clothing and CGC militants and possibly led by a foreman who was in the Front National) drove the CGT out of Grand Couronne but a similar attack at the St. Etienne site was repulsed.

The negotiations which eventually ended the dispute saw many amendments to the Parengo plan and the realisation of demands made primarily by the CGT - though activists from the other unions insisted that the Labour Ministry was moving towards these demands even before the occupation.

It was agreed that Grand Couronne was to be kept open and its equipment modernised and the range of coated paper that Parengo had intended to abandon was kept in production: this meant a reprieve for 400 workers. The workers were paid 50 percent of the salary they would have received but for the 98 day strike and occupation.

The final plan, accepted by the CGT, would still leave only 930 workers on the two sites by the end of the phased restructuring out of 2,040 at the start of

1983 and 1,400 before the occupation. The CGT line - no redundancies, nationalisation and total French control - was thus unsuccessful.

However, 400 jobs were retained within Chapelle Darblay, jobs that the CFDT and CGC were prepared to see lost, even if the CFDT was pressing strongly for state aid to promote industrial regeneration with a view to creating replacement jobs.

The crucial decision to retain production of paper other than newsprint made sense in terms of the spread of products needed for viability and the available markets - that is, on criteria acceptable to the capitalists who would run the business. For the cynics, the original Parenco decision to jettison this part of Chapelle Darblay's business was dictated by its aspirations to gain a greater slice of the European market for its own factories. All the sections at Chapelle Darblay queried that part of the plan but it seems clear that only the CGT's action ensured that it was overturned.

The cost of the rescue package - some 3.2 billion francs spread over five years - caused dissent among ministers and raised eyebrows in banking circles where it was thought unlikely that the company would be producing a big enough surplus to pay back any of the money as planned after five years. As an indication of the scale of this subsidy, it was ten times greater than the sum set aside in 1984 for the redevelopment of mining areas (L'Express, 3rd February 1984); and

Chapelle Darblay looked set to eat up all the funds earmarked by the government in 1984 and 1985 for the timber and allied industries of la filière bois (Le Monde, 16th-17th October 1984).

The EEC was also alarmed at the subsidy and the new President of the Commission, Jacques Delors (who, ironically, had, as French Finance Minister, opposed the decision to shore up Chapelle Darblay) broached the subject with French officials early in 1985 ( Le Monde, 15th January 1985). Rival French manufacturers were also worried about their ability to compete given the scale of investment finance provided by the government for the Rouen plants.

CGT activists argued that their relative success at Chapelle Darblay proved there was a positive way out of the economic crisis, involving investment to save jobs, maintaining production and taking pressure off the trade balance rather than spending money to wind down industrial units that were still technically sound.

All the sections argued against a reliance on newsprint alone yet it was not the force of argument that ensured a thorough revision of the original plan: the reasons must be sought elsewhere, in political contingencies and plain industrial muscle.

First, Laurent Fabius, then Industry Minister and later Prime Minister, was a député for the Rouen area and had called for government aid to ensure the survival of Chapelle Darblay while in opposition: it would have

been highly embarrassing to take a different line when he was in a position to allocate the necessary financial resources and the CGT made sure his previous demands were kept in the public mind by poster campaigns and so on.

Secondly, other local political figures and bodies - notably the local Communist-led councils, but also politicians and newspapers on the Right, mindful of the employment problems in Rouen and seizing the chance to increase the government's discomfort - lobbied strongly to keep Chapelle Darblay going and were less concerned than commentators in Paris about the cost of the exercise.

Third, Chapelle Darblay was a CGT bastion, a company heavily unionised by craft workers whose skills would not easily find employment outside. Enough of these workers, including apparently some members of the CFDT, felt they had little to lose by embarking upon a tough, lengthy dispute.

CGC activists at the company espoused the theory that the dispute was really no more than a preliminary test of strength between the government and the PCF and 'son bras séculier qui est la CGT' ahead of the large-scale job reductions that were already in the pipe-line in mining, steel, shipbuilding and the car industry. For them, the CGT action simply succeeded in pushing the cost of the rescue package way beyond the realms of the acceptable.

That analysis fails to address the question of the

products and jobs saved as a direct result of the occupation. It is also rather contemptuous of the motivations of craftsmen seeing their jobs disappear and their skills becoming redundant, with little chance of finding alternatives as the rest of manufacturing industry contracts.

Yet it is difficult to see the events at Chapelle Darblay as significant in the development of any new trade union perspective on employment. As will be argued at length later, while the discourse of the CGT departed from the traditional pattern, the change was one of form rather than substance and the mode of union action was quite traditional.

On the other hand, the CFDT's approach was radical for a trade union in that the workplace in difficulty was not situated at the centre of its thinking on how to tackle job loss: yet with the CFDT, too, there was a certain disjunction between proposals and action, some members resorting to defensive tactics even as the positive proposals seemed to be bearing fruit (with the 'industrial mission'). An approach which offers hope of possible jobs elsewhere is not necessarily enough to win over a workforce used to above average wages and conditions: such corporatisme was denounced on other occasions by Edmond Maire and his colleagues at CFDT headquarters but it is nonetheless just as much a reality as the economic conditions which the CFDT nationally is attempting to come to terms with.

The CGT cannot be said to have won the dispute. The

workforce was still scheduled to be reduced by 50 percent and there was no real integration of social, technical and industrial considerations in the final plan.

Ultimately, for all the talk of 'new criteria', what seems to have happened here is that the government was forced to hand over a direct and substantial subsidy and the heavily revised Parengo plan judiciously altered its stance on what was feasible in market terms. The outcome is in no way indicative of any new pattern of company management and the unions did not win any rights in the running of the company. The agreement the CGT signed at the end of the occupation deals almost exclusively with personnel matters and the unions are invited only to comment on how the industrial plan set out by Parengo can efficiently be put into effect (Relevé d'Accord, 4th December 1983).

Despite the recourse to experts and bureaux d'études, all the proposals and analyses, the unions were still denied any role in the definition of industrial aims and arrangements, as the CFDT itself complained in a letter to the Socialist Party leader, Lionel Jospin, in the summer of 1983:

Est-il imaginable ... de vouloir  
cautionner les travailleurs et leurs  
organisations dans la seule discussion des  
'plans sociaux', résultat de décisions  
économiques dont ils ont été totalement

exclus, décisions marquées par la logique patronale? (Letter cited in the newspaper, Paris-Normandie Rouen, 2nd-3rd July 1983). (C)

#### NOTES

1. Paribas was nationalised by the Socialist government before being floated off into the private sector again by the Chirac government in 1987.

2. A state body regulated distribution and ensured that a purchaser paid the same for French paper as he would for an imported line. This situation dated from the post-war years and was a reaction to German control of newsprint - and therefore of information to some extent - during the Occupation. This emotional reference was used by the CGT and PCF in their argument for French control of Chapelle Darblay.

#### TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

(A) '...new management criteria which closely link the aims of economic recovery and social progress.' (Oswald Calvetti, CGT officer).

(B) '...to beat down a bastion of the Left, a key firm in the trade because of the conditions won by the action of the workers, with their powerful CGT branches.' (Plan Franco-français).

(C) 'Do you really want to allow the workers and their unions a say only in the 'social plans', the end



result of economic decisions from which they have been totally excluded, decisions marked by the employers' logic?' (CFDT letter in Paris-Normandie Rouen).

#### (IV) RENAULT

Treatment of the Renault case differs somewhat from the format established with the three other companies. Proposals from the unions are considered though often they are at a level of generality relating to the car industry as a whole. Much of the discussion here relates to an innovatory redundancy/retraining scheme which was finally not accepted by the principal unions.

The Renault case is important for at least four reasons. First, Renault remains the symbol of French state involvement in industry. The car firm was confiscated from its founder, Louis Renault, after he was accused of collaborating with the Germans during the last war: subsequently, it epitomised the mass consumption, high growth society which developed in the 1950s and 1960s.

Secondly, the restructuring of the car industry was important for a whole series of branches - steel, electronics, robotics and so on. The Dupuis report to the Conseil Economique et Social was categorical:

L'avenir industriel de la France passe  
par la modernisation de son industrie  
automobile (Liaisons Sociales V400, 23rd  
August 1984). (A)

Beyond this industrial importance, the Régie Renault was also something of a laboratory for workplace relations, leading the way on salaries, pensions, sickness pay and limited exercises in shopfloor discussion groups.

Finally, Renault was also the centre of CGT strength<sup>41</sup>, leading some commentators to talk of co-gestion (Le Monde, 17th October 1985) though it is perhaps more accurate to say that management tended to sound out the CGT on a great many matters going beyond the strictly 'social' and, because of its strength, had to take into account the likely CGT reaction to any decision.

However, the CGT position of strength and management's practice of consultation were both coming under pressure in the 1980s. Already, in the 1970s, strikes by production line workers over working conditions signalled that the traditional pay-off of high salaries and good service conditions was no longer enough. As the recession and intense competition began to hit the European car producers, the French unions, as elsewhere, began to demand a greater say in the company's industrial policies which were of such importance to the continued employment of their members.

#### The French Car Industry in the 1980s

Once the boom years of the 1950s and 1960s were over, the international car firms found themselves fighting fiercely to retain their market share,

particularly in the face of cheaper Japanese imports. Though records were still being set for production, exports and French registrations as late as 1977, problems were clearly emerging in the middle of that decade, as Peugeot, with the assistance of a massive state loan, bought control of Citroen from Michelin in 1974-76. In 1978, Peugeot also took over the European factories of Chrysler, renaming them 'Talbot'.

The idea had been to bank on size to facilitate production of a wider range of models for the international market. However, as the international economy remained depressed, and as Japanese production methods and technology kept their productivity well ahead of their competitors, Peugeot and Renault (but also Fiat, the American producers and British Leyland, too) got into serious financial difficulties.

The problem was not only one of Japanese imports: in fact, these are restricted to three per cent of the French market. Renault and the Peugeot group, PSA, were also faced with a relatively saturated market: 72 per cent of households owned a car and in any recession such a market of renewal is highly vulnerable.

In 1983, PSA ran up losses of 2.6 billion francs. In 1984, Renault's deficit was a massive 12.5 billion francs. Management response was to accept the downturn in market share (in Renault's case, down to 31.8 per cent of the French market in the first eight months of 1984 from 40 per cent in 1980-82, according to the Financial Times of 22nd August 1984), cut back staff and

embark on an extensive restructuring.

Elsewhere, 1984 began with pitched battles at the Talbot plant at Poissy between strikers (mostly of African stock) and non-strikers after PSA announced there were to be 1,950 redundancies.

During the 1960s, the French car firms had filled their production posts with immigrants, often recruited directly from their native villages with the assistance of their own government and the French authorities. At Renault, in 1984, 58 per cent of manual workers at the Billancourt works were immigrants, as were 46 per cent at Flins. Renault, it seems, made some effort to provide these workers with basic literacy but this was the exception amongst the car firms. Everywhere, their training and skills were rudimentary.

Poissy demonstrated that the situation in the car industry was explosive but change was being forced on the companies. The government stepped in, entrusting a report on the industry and how its restructuring should be handled to François Dalle, head of the Oréal cosmetics group.

#### The Dalle Report (2)

Though reasonably optimistic about the European market, forecasting growth of between one and two per cent until the year 2000, Dalle forecast further falls in the coverage of the market by French producers with the resultant under-use of capacity further weakening their relatively poor productivity rates. Having had to

borrow heavily to survive and invest, both Renault and PSA found themselves with annual debt servicing costs amounting to four per cent of their turnover compared with two per cent for their main rivals: the capacity to invest in much needed new technology was therefore impaired.

Taking as an indicator of productivity the ratio of output to workers, Dalle argued that job reductions were inevitable if the necessary productivity gains of seven per cent per annum were to be achieved. In September 1984, when the report was drawn up, 16,000 car industry jobs were already earmarked to go: Dalle said 54,000 more would need to go by the end of 1988 (out of a French workforce of 230,000 in car assembly) and possibly more if sales deteriorated further.

Dalle proposed a series of measures to reduce the workforce: earlier retirement; perhaps a shorter working week if the related salary issues could be resolved adequately; aide à la réinsertion (that is, training and financial assistance for those immigrant workers who chose to return to their native lands); and retraining, with Dalle advocating state funding for a scheme whereby a worker undergoing training received 70 per cent of his former salary and remained attached to the company which subsequently assisted him in his search for employment.

These 'social' measures were at the heart of Dalle's short-term strategy for turning the car industry round: the main problem, the report implied, was overmanning.

Other measures advocated by Dalle included price

deregulation and measures to assist the dealer networks. Although he was probably only following a trend already under way, Dalle recommended Japanese systems of work organisation, involving smaller production units with workers in charge of their own quality control, lower stock levels to cut down on space and costs, and so on. The need for a better educated work force more able to respond to changes in technology was stressed though Dalle tended to play down the importance of technology in the Japanese success story.

Finally, noting the tense industrial relations climate in the car firms, Dalle acknowledged that some form of consensus over the restructuring was vital and the social measures had to be discussed with the unions. But the ending of Taylorism (and, presumably, Fordism) also meant that the workforce might have to cede some of its avantages acquis, Dalle said. It was left unclear whether he meant wages or general conditions but implicit in the report was the need for flexibility in the management of both resources and personnel.

#### The Union Reaction to Dalle

The CGT<sup>(3)</sup> saw the Dalle report as a public relations exercise designed to demonstrate the need for the 6,000 job losses being sought by Citroen and the 15,000 that were in the air at Renault around the time the report was leaked to the press in August 1984.

Above all, the CGT rejected the idea of job reductions as a miracle cure and the 'fatalism' of the

report. There was no strategy for reconquering the home market and nothing about the heavy cost of Renault's programme of worldwide investments, which the CGT fiercely opposed.

The CFDT<sup>4</sup> also suspected that Dalle had been leaked to get the 'overmanning' notion firmly planted in the public consciousness but it broadly accepted Dalle's analysis of developments in the car industry and the belief that a 'gigantesque' effort of adaptation was required on the part of the workforce now that the Fordist production system had been found wanting.

There was disagreement on three points:

i) The emphasis on the problems of the constructors. The CFDT was concerned about the uneven quality of the suppliers and noted that many were in a precarious position as the car firms had used their position as monopoly buyers to keep down component prices. (This had been part of SKF's problem).

ii) Interestingly, the CFDT was against state subsidies being used to solve the problems of redundancy and indebtedness. It argued that the French already paid out enough in the various taxes on car purchases, petrol and so on and it backed the idea of prêts participatifs (loans paid back out of profits).

iii) Dalle had been rather too dismissive of the shorter working week and job sharing as a way of resolving the problem of surplus staff. While the CFDT went along with his estimate of the job reductions



necessary, it would only accept 'social packages' which concentrated on retraining and which left no-one in the dole queues.

Both FO and the CGC also sought negotiations on social measures to avoid any outright redundancies (licenciements secs). The CGC had long been concerned about the state of the car industry<sup>(9)</sup> and agreed with the need for the job reductions advocated by Dalle. However, like the CFDT, it wanted negotiations at branch level and the extension of any schemes to the commercial networks and the small suppliers.

It had three major criticisms of Dalle:

i) The first concerned fiscal policy - always a major CGC concern. It argued that the lightening of the burden of VAT, petroleum duty, road tax and so on would stimulate the market - an aspect of the problem totally neglected by Dalle.

ii) There was little real comment on industrial strategy in the report, particularly the relationship with suppliers, but also the benefits to be had from a revival of cooperation between Peugeot and Renault. (The CGC saw mutual advantages to be had in the fields of research, the evaluation of rivals' vehicles and purchasing policy, for example).

iii) The CGC complained that Dalle was too ready to accept the Japanese model of production and workplace relations when in fact the French way of doing things was essentially sound.

FO was also sceptical about the feasibility of the Japanese system in France and it condemned the 'supply side' emphasis of the report<sup>6</sup>. It noted that, in Japan, productivity gains were achieved through growth not cutbacks. It was astonished at the proposal to raise prices by three per cent given the growing penetration of the French market by foreign companies. Like the CGC, it wanted a reduction in the taxes associated with motoring (in particular, the 33 per cent VAT on new cars).

The notion of sureffectifs was questioned to some extent: FO saw the problem as in large part due to the economic recession and was therefore reluctant to accept any hard figures. In any case, like the other unions, it demanded that licenciements secs be avoided and wanted retraining and in-house re-employment to be the aim of any negotiations.

#### Union Proposals for Renault and the Car Industry

Following its general policy, FO offered a basic analysis of Renault's problems (flawed new model programme, high interest rates, inability to meet much of its investment funding from its own resources due to stagnant markets) but did not offer alternatives, making only a series of demands to do with the workforce. Its statement to the important May 1985 CCE meeting was specific on this point, and a classic summary of FO doctrine:

Force Ouvrière a toujours affirmé qu'il n'était pas dans sa vocation de gérer les entreprises et d'infléchir les choix industriels, financiers et commerciaux pour lesquels les Directions ont compétence et responsabilité. (B)

It wanted negotiations around three demands: no outright redundancies; a big reduction in the working week with no loss of pay (though it recognised that the transformation and modernisation of the production process would have priority); a new agreement on short-time working which was increasingly prevalent.

Underlying these demands were fairly orthodox Keynesian assumptions about purchasing power needing to be maintained to keep up consumption. In contrast to the other unions, FO offered little analysis of the structural nature of the company's problems.

Among the activists I spoke to, there seemed to be an air of resignation, at least as far as the compression of the workforce was concerned. FO demands were minimal in the sense that the only outcome excluded was actual redundancy ('Aucun membre du personnel ne doit pointer à l'ANPE') and the role of the union was to limit the nefarious aspects of the restructuring under way.

FO a constaté que, s'il y a des sureffectifs, il faut trouver des compromis..

On est obligé de subir (la nouvelle technologie). Si les gens ne l'acceptent pas, les voisins vont le faire, ils arriveront à avoir des prix beaucoup plus privilégiés que nous. (FO, Renault).

Although their analysis of the industrial situation had been pushed further, CGC activists I spoke to were similarly resigned to the impending shake-out at Renault, particularly after the failure of the 'social plan' and the arrival of the new Managing Director, Georges Besse<sup>7</sup> (as outlined in the next section). If some still hoped to avoid redundancies by patching together an agreement on retraining and early retirement, at least one was prepared to accept that the company's existence was in peril (or would have been, had it been a private sector company) and the unions might have to swallow unpalatable remedies:

Dans la limite, un élu CGC, dans n'importe quelle instance, ne s'opposerait pas aux licenciements s'il estime que c'est absolument nécessaire pour que l'entreprise survive. (CGC, Renault).

The CGC appeared to support the strategy of Georges Besse as it began to unfold over the first few months of 1985. (The main thrust seemed to be a withdrawal into car manufacturing proper, with Renault's presence in

other sectors scaled down or diluted by cooperative deals).

The most prickly aspect of Renault strategy (because the CGT laid the blame for the losses and job reductions at its door) was the mondialisation of production - Renault's implantation as a manufacturer in other countries. The purchase of American Motors had been costly and it was making heavy losses in 1984-5<sup>(a)</sup>; similarly, a new Mexican plant was facing serious difficulties around the time the job losses were being discussed in France.

The CGC supported the move into these countries and, indeed, saw them as vital for employment in France since French plants supplied parts, spares, expertise and so on. Abandoning the Mexican and US investments would recoup precisely nothing.

On the other hand, the CGC did feel the company ought to adapt its range more for each national market and it wanted a more adventurous export policy (one activist citing the neglect of the South African and Australian markets).

The CFDT also went along with the mondialisation policy, one of its leaders at Renault arguing that 60 per cent of its output was sold or produced elsewhere and it was 'utopian' to think that could continue if Renault pulled out of certain countries.

The CGT, however, denounced what it described as a policy of 'tout à l'étranger', its pamphlets and

spokesmen constantly juxtaposing the 'gouffre financier nord-américain' and the scaling-down of investment projects at home. The CGT claimed that the US and Mexican operations were responsible for a large slice of the 12.5 billion francs deficit recorded in 1984. They were particularly incensed that each year 300,000 Renault vehicles produced abroad were reimported for sale on the French market.

CGT activists were at pains to point out they were not totally against foreign production but the balance had gone awry and it was madness to weaken the national centre of the group. If the argument was raised that markets would be closed to the company if it did not invest in certain countries, the CGT declared that cooperative deals and planned production would be more to the advantage of the respective workforces and that such deals could be readily had with Third World and East European countries. (It fought hard against the decision to end the consultancy and engineering arrangements with the Russian firm Moskvitch in 1985).

A conference of European Renault workers in May 1984, organised by the CG under CGT aegis (of the other French syndicats, only the CGC participated), resolved that the company should not build any new works that would be in competition with existing establishments.

There was a common desire to see new technology introduced to improve skills, products and employment; and a shorter working week with no loss of pay, indeed an increase in purchasing power.

Again we see here the desire to fix a kind of minimum level of employment and production below which a company should not be allowed to fall, regardless of markets and other strategic considerations. The CGT secretary of the CG argued that Renault should use French parts produced by French workers even when others were clearly cheaper: France could not possibly supply more cheaply than some countries with 'underpaid labour', he said, but that was no reason to shun French goods. It did not follow that 'cheapest' was best, for the workforce, the country or even the company. In short:

Il faut passer au-delà de la rentabilité. (E)

As elsewhere, the CGT looked into 'coopérations franco-françaises', particularly planning deals between Renault and suppliers or companies which might have something to offer in the technological field, such as CGE and Matra.

Activists denounced the preoccupation of the management (and the government) with financial criteria which dictated the closing down of capacity in France, often to the benefit of plants in other countries. The CGT claimed that Renault in France was operating at only 70 per cent of capacity against 80 per cent at its Spanish, Portuguese and Belgian sites (Le Monde, 29th May 1985) and, in August 1985, CGT 'commandos' fought a running battle with riot police in an attempt to stop

machinery being taken from the Douai plant in northern France to a Spanish factory.

The CGT argued that, of the 12.5 billion francs losses in 1985, 4.5 billion was the provision for closure and redundancy-related costs; four billion was for interest and loan repayments; and the remainder was attributable to the 'non-qualité de la production'.

The CGT went on to demand that the 4.5 billions should be used to invest in salaries and increased production with the aim of gaining 40 per cent of the French car market and 50 per cent of the lorry trade (against levels at the time of 30 and 31 per cent respectively).

The debt burden should be lightened by a reduction in interest rates<sup>9</sup>:

Les banques, en particulier celles qui sont nationalisées, n'ont pas à réaliser des profits spéculatifs sur les prêts qu'elles consentent à notre entreprise. (CGT tract, May 1985).

The state and the financial and insurance groups under its control had to be 'induced' to invest in the company (or reinvest the proceeds from car insurance sales, as the CGT put it).

More constructively, the CGT demanded the introduction of a 'livret-épargne auto' - a savings scheme with preferential interest rates designed for the



future car buyer. In common with the other unions, the CGT wanted to see VAT and petrol taxes reduced (but it also suggested a special tax on cars above 11cv).

The costs incurred through poor quality parts and rushed workmanship could be reduced through training and investment in new equipment and integrating the manufacture of parts within the Renault group and French industry in general.

The CGT also called (naturally) for the company to help stimulate the market by paying higher wages, to the low paid in particular. (It argued that salaries could not be the cause of Renault's problems since the wage bill had dropped from 25 per cent of turnover in 1980 to 20 per cent five years later).

The CGT said that its proposals were the result of discussions in the workshops and offices of each plant. However, the air of generality of these 'proposals' - really little more than a list of demands and arguments on the financial plane - suggest that they were more the work of officials. The presentation of the Analyses booklet to the press and indeed the contents show that the CGT was pitching its solutions at the industrial branch level and it strongly urged a renewal of the cooperation between Renault and Peugeot which had lapsed in the 1970s.

The CGT press (see especially the feature in La Vie Ouvrière, 2118, 1st April 1985) concentrated predominantly on the financial and commercial aspects of

the Renault affair. As regards the concrete conditions and organisation of production on the ground, the CGT offered only general analyses rather than proposals for change - arguments about quality, for example: retouches, or last minute 'rectifications', occupied 10 per cent of the work force at Douai and cost six per cent of the group's turnover, or one third of the 1984 loss, according to the company's own figures, the CGT said. This situation could be remedied by an improvement in working conditions, slower assembly line speeds, more training and more workers.

From which point, the CGT argued that the problem at Renault was not sureffectifs but sous-effectifs.

Given the complexity and importance of the problem (the car industry provided work for 800,000 in all), the other unions also tended to situate their arguments at the branch level and many of the proposals fell within the political sphere - tax changes being the obvious example.

However, the CFDT also stated that it would be making proposals in all the plants, at all levels though, judging from the examples given in its press, much depended on the energy of each section and the 'proposals' were of uneven quality.

Like the CGT - though it recognised the seriousness of the financial problems - it was unhappy that financial criteria overshadowed all else: in particular, it saw no good reason for certain of the closures

announced by management and the ending of investment in such products of the future as ceramics and liquid crystal.

One example (in Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2065, 9th May 1985) involved the scaling down of investment at the Maubeuge body works and the transfer of new models to Belgium. The CFDT agreed that on financial grounds, rationalisation was 'irrefutable' but industrially the plan was incoherent. Not only was investment maintained in the 'downstream' assembly department but Maubeuge, a plant capable of adapting rapidly to changes in design and specification, was located in an area where the plastics industry was strong and it was therefore ideally placed to research and produce the lightweight materials of the future.

The CFDT also rejected the fatalistic acceptance of Renault's reduced market share in France and, with the assistance of its consumers' association, ASSECO, put forward proposals on making the commercial network more receptive to customers' needs. Many of the suggestions revolved around the idea of making after-sales service, repairs and the supply of parts more reliable and speedy. If a car needed repairs while still under guarantee, the CFDT suggested that the customer should have the use of a second-hand car while his own was off the road.

It also wanted the dealer networks to be able to supply 'customised' models to clients. The slogan used to put all this over was 'le client Roi' and to show

this was not mere rhetoric the CFDT urged negotiations between the unions, the company and consumer associations. (See FGMM-CFDT, Bulletin du Militant, 284, April 1985).

On the question of manning, the CFDT, as noted above, put the stress on retraining with an early start to on-the-job training so that skills would keep pace with changes in technology. It also advocated, of course, a much reduced working week but, unlike the other syndicats, and in line with its national policy, it was prepared to accept regressive compensation - that is, more compensation for those at the bottom end of the pay scale.

One final indicator of the attitude of the unions towards the restructuring effort came with their reaction to the introduction of fonds salariaux: these are funds established by contributions from the workers' wage packets and destined, usually, for investments which are likely to create jobs. Two such funds were set up by Renault after the law of 29th December 1983 which authorised them. (See Liaisons Sociales C3 107, 14th February 1985; and Le Monde, 8th February 1985).

The first concerned the plant at Maubeuge already mentioned above: from November 1984, 87 per cent of the workforce voluntarily agreed to pay, each month for two years, either one per cent or 0.5 per cent of their wage into a special fund which would then be used for training. This use was suggested by the CFDT, the

majority union at Maubeuge.

The money was blocked for up to five years and repaid at a maximum of 10 per cent, with tax advantages.

A second agreement was reached in February 1985 for the whole of Renault. In this case, an obligatory one-off levy of 0.2 per cent was made on each wage packet, the company adding from its own funds twice the amount collected. Workers were able to make additional voluntary payments and the money was to be repayable at an advantageous interest rate after five years. It was to be used for direct job-related investment in the group.

Interestingly, the obligatory levy was to be offset by a bonus payment to each worker: the idea seemed to be, then, to 'symbolically associate each worker with the company', as Le Monde of 8th February 1985 put it.

Perhaps for this reason both FO and the CGT were hostile to the scheme and with wages already hit in 1984, neither union was favourable to the idea of a further fall in take-home pay, though the issue of the special bonus was sidestepped (L'Humanité, 7th February 1985; FO Hebdo, 1825, 30th January 1985).

On the other hand, the CFDT, CGC and CFTC<sup>(10)</sup> were all enthusiastic - perhaps another small sign of the 'realignment' on the French labour scene, with the pragmatists lining up against the archéos, the defenders of avantages acquis and unbending tradition.

### The Failure of the Renault 'Social Plan' Talks

At the end of September 1984, a strike broke out at the Renault plant in Le Mans, spreading rapidly to the other major sites. The spark for the Le Mans walk-out was the news that workers would be obliged to take a week of their holiday between December 24th 1984 and January 1st 1985 in order, management said, to reduce the risk of short-time working later in 1985.

Yet, underlying the discontent was uncertainty over employment at Renault. The Dalle report had been given a great deal of media publicity and rumours abounded that up to 15,000 jobs were to disappear in Renault, perhaps as many as 1,000 of them from Le Mans.

The CGT immediately supported the strikers and was joined by the CFDT, FO and even some CGC activists (despite a denunciation of the dispute by CGC leader Paul Marchelli). However, it soon became clear, as the CGT sought to extend the strike to other Renault plants (and beyond), that it was aiming not only at management strategy for turning Renault round but the whole 'modernisation' effort of the government and the consequent job loss in heavy manufacturing industry. (See, for example, Le Monde, 2nd October 1984: 'La CGT défie le pouvoir').

Just as the strike appeared to be fading (management had offered a bonus, a small cost of living increase and the possibility of a revision, by local agreement, in the end-year holiday arrangements), Renault came up with

a radical scheme for soaking up the overmanning in the company.

As originally outlined to the unions (Le Monde, 4th October 1984), the plan was a means of substantially reducing the company payroll without making anyone redundant: better, workers would be offered the chance of retraining for the car industry jobs of the future and Renault committed itself to finding new jobs, inside or outside the company, for any workers displaced.

In return, the company needed a more mobile workforce - in occupational and geographical terms - and a recognition by the unions that productivity gains of seven per cent per annum were needed to catch up with the competition.

White collar and blue collar supervisory grades would not be exempt from the pruning process: more than half the 15,300 projected job losses would come from these groups (Libération, 28th September 1984).

During subsequent negotiations, management said it would not formally open talks on a shorter working week though it was open to any 'job and revenue sharing' proposals (Le Monde, 18th October 1984).

The draft agreement was ready at the beginning of December and is worth examining in some detail.

The first phase involved inviting candidates from throughout the group for early retirement and compensated voluntary redundancy, with immigrants choosing to return 'home' receiving a minimum 120,000

francs to cover relocation and retraining (aide à la réinsertion). Workers who remained could then move to fill a post which the company wanted to retain but which was now vacant.

In the second phase, each plant management would decide on the positions that were to disappear, the workers affected in each category and those the company proposed should be retrained or redeployed. (No-one over the age of 48 would be listed without his agreement and criteria such as seniority and family commitments would be taken into account). Each of these workers would then be offered a choice of alternative positions and training on full pay.

In the third phase, a revised and definitive list of 'excess' workers would be drawn up: if they now accepted a job offered to them, they entered the same procedure (mobility and retraining) as before. Those who, in the meantime had found a post outside the company would leave with a minimum redundancy payment of 50,000 francs.

To those still unaccounted for, the company offered 'training leave' (congés de conversion) of six months at 70 per cent of salary with a choice of three jobs, inside or outside the group, at the end of it (and a bonus payment).

A joint union-management body was to be formed to oversee this whole procedure and it would try to find an 'individual solution' for any worker who refused all the above options. Only if this, too, failed would



redundancy proper be considered.

The disputes at Talbot and Citroen had led the government to set up the Centre de Formation Technologique for the retraining of car workers but the Renault plan, with the guarantees of alternative employment for those displaced, was a radical innovation.

Unlike Kodak, for example, and even the industrial mission set up after the Chapelle Darblay dispute, Renault committed itself to finding secure jobs for those who could not be placed within the group. The agreement stipulated that these external positions would be paid at the standard rates for the branch and, furthermore, if a worker was made redundant from his new company, he would have a priority claim to any vacancies at Renault within the following twelve months.

The terms of this agreement were certainly unparalleled in France during the period under study, yet ultimately they were rejected by both the CGT and the CFDT.

A CGT official at Renault argued that at the end of the training process, a worker could still find himself 'sans garantie de réintégration', yet, as the draft plan suggests, this would only be so in extreme cases.

The CGT's main reason for rejecting the accord lay beyond its details, in the failure to hold any talks with the unions on industrial strategy. For the CGT, if the stratégie de déclin was not reversed, if the company did not commit itself to winning back lost market share

in France and in Europe, then any 'social' plan would be inadequate as redundancies were bound to occur.

CGT activists also argued that many small firms were dependent on Renault orders: if Renault cut back, these firms would also have to retrench. Where then would Renault workers be able to find employment?

(This refusal of Renault strategy as essentially deflationary was also the line of the PCF: through its economist, Philippe Herzog - and its important cellule in the company - it devoted a lot of time to Renault in 1984-5, advocating the creation of 25,000 jobs, mainly to improve the quality of cars at the factory gates but also for the launch of a new 'popular' model for which it saw a promising market).

In a nutshell, the CGT argument rejected the 'complacent acceptance' of a reduced home market (one activist stated that the only real problem was 'austerity in Europe' - that is, it was all the fault of political choices made by the European governments) and called for increased production with a new emphasis on quality and reliability to win back market share.

Therefore, a priori, it was against any agreement which was based on the premise that overall employment in Renault had to fall.

On the other hand, activists were not opposed to the idea of mobility, as long as this was strictly voluntary, and the retraining of the manual work force in the skills of the future was something the Confederation as a whole was clamouring for.

Nonetheless, the CGT rejected the plan and activists stood by this decision even when it appeared to have contributed to the arrival of Georges Besse and looked, at best, a tactical error.

The other Confederations are consistent in their reading of political motivations into CGT actions but, in this case at least, there appears to be some justification. CFDT leaders at Renault contended that the PCF, having left the government coalition during the summer months, was steadily increasing its criticism of Socialist policies, painting a black picture of the state of manufacturing industry and the divisions being introduced into society. Signing the Renault accord would have contradicted this line at a time when the PCF and the CGT nationally were attempting to mobilise against government policy.

Furthermore, the CGT was at this time fiercely attacking the patronat (and the other Confederations) over the flexibility talks: the issue there was also job security and the defence of traditional conditions and past acquis. To be consistent, the CGT also had to come out against the loss of thousands of well paid and hitherto secure jobs in what was its 'fortress' at Renault.

The rejection of the social plan highlights an ambiguity in the CGT's new attitude to questions of management and industrial strategy. In refusing to be limited to immediate personnel issues, the CGT is pushing its right to be involved in broader matters

which, in the final analysis, are determinants of employment.

But here, its reluctance to talk unless industrial policy was on the agenda proved counter-productive: its unwillingness to compromise with management - accept the guarantees enshrined in the social plan even if excluded from the industrial debate - seems to reflect a refusal to compromise with the capitalist system at large.

Previously, that refusal was epitomised by the politicisation of discontent, the 'amplification' of grievances onto a national, political stage. In the 1980s that strategy was no longer operationable: political change had taken place and even if the new government did not have the shape the CGT leadership would have liked, it had to be wary of contesting it, at least initially; furthermore, workers and activists were facing growing problems in the workplace and wanted action on the ground, immediate response to difficulties, not one-day protest strikes and the promise of better times when a 'sound' government was in place.

In effect, the CGT's response was not to shelve its maximalism but to translate it into demands at the level of the firm and the industrial branch, demands which looked to be addressing concrete situations but which nonetheless were essentially transformative, needing systemic change rather than piecemeal concessions by management if they were to be met.

Equally illuminating was the split between CFDT

activists and their leadership at both company and Federation level. For the accord was finally turned down by the CFDT, the principal reason given by the activists being the lack of any commitment on a shorter working week beyond the promise of talks in each plant. A reduction in the working week is, of course, a major plank in the employment policy of the Confederation but the pragmatism which it nowadays encourages in its activists was evidently lacking here.

CFDT leaders at Renault (one of whom described the accord as 'le plus positif, le plus originel de la France sur le plan social') also noted that their activists had underestimated the financial problems of the company, partly due to the reassuring noises made by management right up to the summer of 1984, partly due to their lack of training in economics.

Analysis of the leaflets distributed by the CFDT at Billancourt from December through the early months of 1985 show that the CFDT grassroots held similar reservations to the CGT on several points: the suspicion that some workers would be coerced into 'volunteering' for redundancy or mobility; retraining seen, especially in the latter stage of the procedure, as 'l'antichambre du départ de l'entreprise sous la contrainte'; the likelihood of redundancies despite the accord if the still mysterious recovery plan proved inadequate.

After a shake-up at the head of the car division in early 1984 and the subsequent postponement of the industrial plan, the CFDT, despite rejecting CGT

proposals as fantasy and describing its calls for action as dictated by political considerations, came even closer to the CGT view:

Il n'est pas possible de parler effectif, si l'on ne connaît pas le plan de redressement industriel de la Régie... (et) si la direction ne s'explique pas sur les moyens qu'elle entend mettre en oeuvre pour redresser la situation commerciale (CFDT Renault, Notre Lutte, 973, 13th December 1984. (G))

Local activists also seemed to concentrate more on the 'conjunctural', that is, short-term economic reasons behind Renault's problems than the leadership with its stress on the structural changes in the market and car industry employment.

The decision of the activists (by a 55 per cent majority) to reject the Social Plan was slammed by their Federation which had viewed the Renault plan as a point of reference for other groups of workers in the car and engineering industry. What is more, it felt that the syndicat had squandered an opportunity to break the hold the CGT had on Renault management, of forcing managers to consult all the syndicats, not just the CGT (FGMM Info, No.1, January 1985).

A similar division occurred within FO, with the Federation in favour of signing on the basis that there

were serious guarantees for the workforce and nothing better was achievable but some activists preferring the safety of the provisions in the Code du Travail and previous national agreements, even if the accord looked more favourable. The position was rather reversed with the CGC: local activists and leadership signed the agreement against the wishes of the Confederation, which was worried that CGT influence on the joint bodies overseeing the scheme ('Comités de Salut Public!') would be to the disadvantage of its own membership.

As it happened, management decided to withdraw the offer after the rejection by the CGT and CFDT, before FO had reached a final decision. One FO activist (in favour of signing) felt that the agreement could still have worked with just the signatures of FO, the CGC and the CSL, especially as the CFDT syndicat was under pressure from the Federation to reverse its decision. He felt that management may have hastily withdrawn it due to second thoughts about the cost: it was, he said, 'tellement magnifique que c'était sûrement intenable'.

Perhaps the government, too, had a rethink. It was vital to avoid a damaging dispute in Renault but it was just as important to avoid giving such conspicuous privileges to a relatively small group of workers: already, Ministers had been at pains to point out there was no modèle Renault that might be extended to all redundant workers (Le Monde, 9th October 1984).

After the failure of the talks, Renault went ahead anyway with some of the provisions though now there was no union check on progress (other than the statutory consultation with the CE, etc) through the joint bodies.

In the wake of the failure - perhaps a direct result of it - Bernard Hanon was replaced at the head of Renault by Georges Besse, who had pulled the chemicals and aluminium firm PUK into the black, partly through extensive job reductions (achieved without redundancies).

Hanon was seen by some commentators as being the victim of the need to reconcile the unreconcilable: turn Renault around financially and commercially without provoking shock waves on the industrial relations front in a CGT bastion.

However, the Renault affair can more justifiably be seen as another demonstration of the CGT's fading influence. It sank the 'Social Plan' but it was unable to stem the flow of voluntary redundancies, early retirements and other job losses during 1985 - none of them part of any formally announced redundancy package. Neither was it able to mobilise the workforce against management policy: the decision to hold a journée d'action on the politically significant date of May 10th 1985 (four years after Mitterrand's presidential victory) was a signal failure.

Again, the mighty Renault syndicat was reduced to guerrilla action, supported by comrades in the SNCF and elsewhere, to attempt to stop machinery being transferred



from France to Spain and make a stand against the mondialisation strategy. As at SKF, this seemed merely to highlight its lack of real power, achieving little and alienating the workers whose basic insecurity remained.

#### NOTES

1. All the other Confederations were present in Renault - the CFDT was in fact the largest union at Flins. However, the CGT had nearly half the total number of votes cast in the 'employee directors' election in 1984 and was in a massive majority at the Billancourt plant I visited.

2. Details taken from Liaisons Sociales, V403, 24th October 1984.

3. Details gathered from interviews with activists, union leaflets, press reports and the CGT Metalworkers' Federation (FGM) booklet, Analyses et Propositions pour l'Industrie Automobile, (1985).

4. Details gathered from interviews, union leaflets, and the national and union press.

5. See the pamphlet, Non à la crise de l'automobile, prepared by the CGC Metalworkers' Federation in October 1980. Comments on Dalle taken from interviews and the document, Positions CFE-CGC concernant le projet de rapport sur l'industrie automobile française, 8th November 1984.

6. Details from interviews and the analysis in FO Hebdo, 1816, 7th November 1984.

7. Georges Besse had performed a similar rationalisation at PUK and was called in when Bernard Hanon was sacked after the failure of the 'social plan' negotiations.

Besse was gunned down in a Paris street at the end of 1986, apparently by members of the extreme Left group, Action Directe.

8. Renault finally sold out to Chrysler in March 1987.

9. Michelin had received such a loan at 4-1/2 pct shortly before.

10. The CFTC had long advocated a similar scheme - the Livret d'Epargne d'Entreprise: see page 59 of the Report presented to its 42nd Congress, Marseilles, November-December 1984.

#### TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

(A) 'The industrial future of France is tied in with the modernisation of its motor industry.' (Dupuis Report).

(B) 'FO has always maintained that it was not its vocation to manage firms and divert the industrial, financial and commercial decisions for which management has the competence and responsibility.' (FO, May 1985).

(C) 'FO has concluded that if there is overmanning, compromises must be found... We are obliged to put up with (new technology). If the blokes don't accept it,

the people next door are going to do it and they'll end up with much more competitive prices than us.' (FO, Renault).

(D) 'Within reason, a CGC rep, in any capacity, would not oppose redundancies if he reckons they are absolutely necessary for the company to survive.' (CGC, Renault).

(E) 'We have to look further than mere profitability.' (CGT, Renault).

(F) 'The banks, particularly the nationalised ones, shouldn't be making speculative profits on the loans they give our company.' (CGT, May 1985).

(G) 'It's impossible to talk about manning if you don't know the company's industrial recovery plan... (and) if management doesn't explain what means it intends to use to turn around the commercial situation.' (CFDT, Renault, 13th December 1984).

## (V) CONCLUSION

The sort of union action investigated above would not have taken place in France fifteen years ago, for the reasons, mainly political and ideological, outlined in the previous chapters. Before attempting to draw out the significance of this development, it is useful to highlight the main themes which emerge from the cases discussed and others taken from a review of the union press in the post-1981 period.

### 'Economic Nationalism'

In each of the cases, there was a strong emphasis placed by most of the activists on French production and employment levels. If the CGT was most vociferous in its pro-French demands, activists in other Confederations were also concerned about the state of national industry - naturally, since their members are French and the workforce, for the most part, seeks to find employment within the nation's boundaries.

There was some awareness amongst the militants that perhaps a European approach was needed to tackle certain problems though this limited recognition of shared international interests was rejected by the CGT.

For the CGT, the EEC is run for the benefit of the large multinationals and is no more than a tool of US imperialism (Analyses et Documents Economiques, No. 9, February 1984. Special issue on Europe). It refuses any

'rationalisation' plans emanating from Brussels (on steel, paper, etc) and any corporate strategy which entails a reduction in French industrial capacity to the benefit of another country.

In the cases studied here, it is necessary to distinguish between two different problems: with Kodak and SKF, plant closures were the result of strategic choices made by group management - located, in this instance, overseas, though the same problem would apply if the company were French.

The CGT maintained that the problems at Renault were also caused by management's decision to 'internationalise' its productive capacity which reduced the levels of investment in France. However, Renault also had to contend with massive losses as a group, as did Chapelle Darblay.

In both circumstances, however, the CGT refused to accept the choices made by management (or the government) since, in hitting French capacity, they were deemed against the interests of French workers. Employment in France (and the French trade balance, though this only because of the related direct effect on employment levels) was therefore the major priority of the CGT and all other considerations were secondary, including the financial problems of these companies, dismissed as 'problems of capitalism': such difficulties evaporated in the CGT plans, with finance to be had, as if by magic, from the groups concerned, or, as actually happened in the case of Chapelle Darblay, from central

government.

Ironically, the CGT was the keenest of all the Confederations to sponsor contact with foreign workers in the various transnational groups. The aim appeared to be to gain agreement on ratios of production as they existed prior to group restructuring - to 'petrify' these quotas for ever more. Unless, one might surmise, the French units increased production which necessitated taking on more staff...

In several of the examples cited in a UGICT seminar<sup>'1'</sup>, production of materials or manufactures was retrieved from other countries to the benefit of French order books. There was no questioning of what this might mean for Italian workers, or South Korean workers, or American workers. The CGT calls for 'selective import controls' as necessary to protect weakened or fledgeling French producers: the question of their impact on companies elsewhere is answered by vague suggestions that 'cooperation must replace competition' though how this will tackle the problem of finite or declining markets is evaded.

Perhaps that is not seen as a problem by the CGT: it remains 'productivist', meaning the continuous growth of industry and manufacturing is seen as a goal of developed societies and there is relatively little questioning, certainly in comparison with the CFDT, of what is actually produced (though more nowadays on how it is produced). The CGT states simply that there is a crying need for more hospitals, more bottom of the range

cars, more coal, and the economics of this production are not really treated with any more attention than in the days when Benoît Frachon told the 30th Congress in 1955:

Je ne sais pas combien coûterait aux capitalistes la réalisation des propositions contenues dans notre programme et je vous avoue que je ne m'en soucie pas beaucoup.  
(Cited in Mouriaux, 1982: 182). (A)

One CGT militant at SKF contended:

On a toujours fait des propositions - maintenant c'est chiffré, c'est plus sérieux. (B)

However, one can only be suspicious of the reasoning behind certain figures - though, on the other hand, the presentation of company accounts and a fortiori the financial arguments made by companies for shutting certain plants often seem designed to prove that no 'science' of economics exists.

Certainly, the CGT - and the other Confederations, too - had some success with public opinion when the narrow financial concerns of companies were contrasted with local needs and, if it concerned an international restructuring, national interests.

### The Increasing Concern with Local Specificities

This concern with local issues, the specificities of each company's situation, has been one of the distinguishing features of the 'proposition force' unionism which has developed in France. Though there was still a tendency to call for government action (reflation, protectionism, and so on), even the CGT activists in the firms visited had seen the need to research their company's operations and markets and make out a case for their proposals on the basis of their findings.

The tendency was even more clear-cut in the case of CFDT activists, partly as a result of the strategic choice made by their Confederation to concentrate on the concrete concerns of the workforce. In all cases, the provisions of the Auroux legislation encouraged the trend.

But there has also been some attempt to apprehend the wider local and regional problems associated with job loss. In fact, the CFDT has on occasions shifted the whole centre of its approach from the company initially concerned to the locality affected<sup>(2)</sup>: this was the case in Rouen during the Chapelle Darblay dispute and in Lorraine where the steel industry's decline was halted only temporarily by the arrival of the Socialist government. In this latter case, the new approach of the union movement was epitomised by the (controversial) appointment of Jacques Chérèque, CFDT number two and a



former Metalworkers leader, as Commissaire with the brief of stimulating reindustrialisation in Lorraine.

This shift of focus away from the national stage predated the arrival of Mitterrand (see Tozzi, 1982, for one reading of the influence of regionalism on the French labour movement) but was nurtured by the Socialists' decentralisation policy which gave more economic power to regional assemblies as well as by the revival of the comités locaux d'emploi (CLE), one positive result of the 'flexibility' negotiations.

These CLEs may help in overcoming one problem the unions have faced in their efforts at regional level: with whom should they be negotiating? There is perhaps no set prescription here, but the revived comités, made up of representatives of the unions, employers and local councils, are clearly appropriate vehicles for the airing of proposals.

The industrial mission set up at Rouen is a good example of another body set up with union, employer and political representation, this time with a more specific brief than the CLE's and with funding to research projects and coordinate investment plans.

The CFDT was the moving force behind the Rouen initiative and in another case, in Aquitaine, it played a formative role in setting up the innovative Association pour le développement de l'épargne et son investissement en Région Aquitaine. This tripartite body (local authorities, employers' organisations and all the other Confederations eventually took part) managed a

savings fund, 20 per cent of which could be invested in regional development and job-creating initiatives, the rest, by law, having to go into shares.

Such Fonds Communs de Placement à Risques, endorsed by the CFDT and CGC in particular, are a clear example of the French unions' increasing willingness to make positive proposals at local and regional level, where in the past they might have only waged defensive battles, more often than not seeking political solutions and putting their energies into 'days of action' in Paris to press home their point.

The 'localisation' of union activity that this involves has surely been one of the more significant developments in French trade unionism since 1968 and one which seems likely to continue, given the uneven nature of job loss and the diversity of regional situations with which the unions will continue to be confronted.

#### Working Time<sup>(3)</sup>

Surprisingly, only in the Renault case did the issue of working time have much prominence. Though all the Confederations want to see a reduction, the problems at the firms I visited were so grave that activists were obliged to come up with much more far-reaching proposals if they were to entertain any hopes of saving jobs.

Besides, the CGT and FO tend to see reduced working time as a straight demand aimed at improving the quality of working life: they are reluctant to accept changes in working patterns, which might have the opposite effect,

and have denounced the CFDT for being prepared to bargain over variations to rotas and shifts in order to save jobs.

The example of the CGT syndicat at Dassault-Bordeaux, which proposed the elimination of overtime to allow 200 workers to be taken on (La Vie Ouvrière, 2109, 28th January 1985) stands out precisely because the weekly Panorama des luttes is studded with reports of occupations and strikes over little more than straight demands, labelled 'proposals', for jobs to be maintained.

The CFDT press, on the other hand, is full of examples of syndicats putting forward negotiable packages to offset or limit the extent of proposed job cuts, more often than not involving reduced working time with rearranged rotas and a different work organisation to allow machines to turn for longer. Crucially, the CFDT does not automatically demand full compensation for the hours not worked: both FO and the CGT demand that salaries be maintained in all cases.

The CFDT agreed with most of the studies produced in this field<sup>4</sup>: reduced working time only has an impact on employment if unit costs are held down and production levels maintained. Thus, it emphasised the need for decentralised talks (as opposed to a national agreement or government edict) on the hours and organisation of work. (See especially Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2041, 22nd November 1984; and 1938, 11th November 1982).

This, of course, was the view of the CFDT leadership

at Renault but there it was rejected by the activists who sought an immediate cut as the only way of tackling the employment problem brought about by (and both leadership and grassroots used the same term) 'excess hours worked'. Similarly, the CFDT activists at Kodak were against the idea of non-compensation for any reduction in hours, feeling that new technology was a net destroyer of jobs and therefore a shorter working week was vital to soak up some of the resultant 'over-manning'.

All the same, ambitious examples of reduced working time or work sharing appeared regularly in the CFDT press:

i) New Technology and a fall in demand for car components threatened 128 jobs at Lif-Hutchinson before the CFDT negotiated a deal under which 256 of the female production workers agreed to work 19.5 hours per week for 80 per cent of their salary, with a return to full-time work if orders picked up (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2010, 29th March 1984).

ii) At Arthur-Martin at Revin, 217 proposed job losses were reduced to 72 by cutting the working week to 37 hours with only 90 per cent compensation. (Yet activists saw this as evidence that proposals such as the shorter working week, work sharing and early retirement were not a panacea for job loss, presumably because jobs and purchasing power would still be taken out of the economy as a result of such deals (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2040, 15th November 1984).

iii) A particularly interesting initiative came from the CFDT's electrical industry Federation. It argued that a reduction in the working week to 35 hours could create 6,000 jobs: funding would come, in equal amounts, from the government (called upon to subsidise jobs rather than pay dole), the utility company (from productivity gains) and the work force, if they opted not to take full compensation for the shorter working week (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2036, 18th October 1984). Attempts were made to publicise the plan through fetes and other forms of non-industrial action during 1984 and 1985 but they made little impression on the authorities.

Contrast the types of initiative sponsored in the name of 'solidarity' by the CGT. In addition to the 'franco-français' ventures recorded in the case studies, the following examples, taken from the Liaisons Sociales report of the UGICT seminar mentioned above (Document R621 of 27th July 1983), give an idea of the CGT line: thus, a group of hospital workers told how they got their managers to buy Renault rather than Italian vehicles; and workers at the Dunkirk shipyards managed to force a rethink on an order for a container vessel which had looked like going to Sweden or South Korea but was finally given to a state company; the same workers then initiated studies with activists in local firms on the possibility of supplying fittings previously only available from abroad.

The CGT refuses to be constrained by what others present as 'objective' market factors: it seeks to alter

the shape of the market environment and enlarge the possibilities for French companies, with the terms and conditions of the workforce remaining a fixed factor. The CFDT, on the other hand, frequently tries to seek an accommodation with the market which may require some sacrifice on the part of those in employment in order to help those who are, or might soon be, without it.

FO, for its part, pushed the shorter working week, especially through the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), partly as a job-creating measure but also, as several speakers at its 1984 Congress pointed out, simply as a long-standing demand to improve conditions for those in employment (FO, 1985: 285-295). Its activists invariably followed the Confederation line that a cut in hours without full compensation was self-defeating since it would cut salaries, consumption and therefore jobs - a position identical to that of the CGT.

The CGC was reticent on this point: it disliked the CFDT formula (full compensation only for those on the lowest salaries) because it sought to maintain differentials but, on the other hand, it was trying to cultivate a modernist and non-dogmatic image. On the whole, CGC activists placed more stress on retraining and aspects of flexibility other than work time.

#### New Criteria and Market Forces

A central issue in all the case studies was the very criteria which companies used to justify their

restructuring plans. Inevitably, given the nature of capitalist companies which need to produce a surplus from their trading activities, these were predominantly financial, supported by data of an industrial and commercial nature. It is interesting, then, that the CGT usually based its counter-attack on the nature of these criteria whereas the CFDT, while professing a desire to move beyond the confines of capitalist structures, nonetheless accepted the reality of the economic constraints companies were working under and sought to find alternative solutions taking these into account. This 'realism' was summed up by a national official:

Il s'agit pas de tromper les  
travailleurs. Si elle (l'entreprise) est  
viable, elle est viable dans le cadre actuel. (C)

Of course, this 'realism' often caused dissent at local level, some workers refusing to see why they should be the scapegoats for managerial errors or suffer - even in the name of 'new solidarity' - the effects of economic contingencies and the chance workings of market forces. Thus, the local CFDT leadership met resistance to its proposals from its own members at Chapelle Darblay while Renault members incurred the wrath of their Metalworkers Federation by rejecting the proposed 'social plan' which might have set a precedent for the whole industry.

The CFDT section at Kodak was scathing about its

Confederation's 'realism':

Pour nous, ce n'est pas le syndicalisme.

Il y a à la fois une perte d'emplois et une perte du pouvoir d'achat. Ça réduit le rôle du syndicalisme à néant. (D)

FO refused to be drawn into the debate about criteria or alternatives: it never questioned managerial competence ('nous, on n'a pas d'éléments pour juger' - FO, Renault) unless there were obvious irregularities and, more than the two other leading Confederations, it usually followed rather than initiated action by the workforce.

Accepting to work within the market economy yet still concerned to change the rules under which this economy evolved, the CFDT had to demonstrate that its plans were viable. Often, an infusion of investment funds is required - and here, too, the CFDT has demonstrated its belief that the union can make solid improvements in the workers' interests now, under the capitalist system, and not only in some hypothetical, more politically congenial future. Hence its promotion of the industrial mission at Rouen, its support for fonds salariaux at Renault and elsewhere and its initiative in Aquitaine mentioned above. Syndicalisme Hebdo (No. 2035, 11th October 1984, p.5) was not understating the significance of the latter when it described it as:



...un jalon de plus vers l'élaboration de réponses nouvelles aux défis de la crise. Une de ces initiatives qui entraînent le mouvement syndical dans une véritable révolution culturelle en l'obligeant à sortir d'un rôle purement défensif. (E)

By its action to move savings in a direction that conventional fund managers might not normally take, the CFDT would argue that here was an example of working within capitalism while positively changing its orientations, moving them in a direction more favourable to labour.

Opponents of this general line (the CGT but also internal dissidents) might perhaps criticise the CFDT with the standard argument against reformism: it merely perpetuates the system, leaving the same people in real control, under the guise of 'softening it up'.

The gap between a 'reformist' and a 'revolutionary' stance is never clear cut, however, and sometimes the CGT argues that it, too, is gradually taking over areas previously under the control of capital, though it still seems to situate this in the context of an on-going attempt to overthrow the system:

S'il y a crise du modèle capitaliste,  
crise de la logique capitaliste, cela  
implique pour le syndicat des responsabilités

nouvelles. Il s'agit en quelque sorte - et c'est le sens de l'action que mène la CGT - de s'approprier petit à petit des terrains qui étaient jusqu'à présent des terrains réservés au patronat. Ce sont les terrains de la gestion, de l'entreprise, des choix de production, de la gestion de l'économie, des finalités de la production (CRMSI, 1984: 76). (F)

The CGT proposals in the case studies and elsewhere were often couched in terms critical of the system as a whole - of the cutbacks decided on purely financial grounds which cannot be justified in terms of needs, of the waste - financial, technical, human - inherent in a system driven by the search for profit.

Its proposals, therefore, involve not so much a package aimed at aiding the recovery of a firm in difficulty as an indictment of the system which got the workers into such a situation. The details of its plans are often directly opposed to the programme advocated by management whereas the CFDT takes the environment into account and seeks to inflect rather than 'derail' conventional initiatives. Perhaps the most telling distinction between the two approaches is that CFDT plans are usually negotiable under the current rules of the game: CGT proposals may be coherent in their own terms but more often than not they are difficult to negotiate around and frequently this is due to the financial element.

SKF, for example, was called upon to use significant amounts of group investment money, destined to rationalise (that is, pare back) French operations, to actually build up French productive capacity and relieve the Ivry site. At the UGICT conference referred to earlier, there was a similar plan which required an infusion of funds into a chlorine company, Jarrie, by PUK which part-owned it; at Kodak, too, the plans put forward by the CGT and CFDT involved the use of investment funds in ways directly opposed to those laid down in company strategies, although here both syndicats had coherent industrial proposals which they claimed were profitable.

That statement gives rise to two reflections which will need to be taken further in the concluding remarks: first, as with the criticism of CFDT ventures in general that was noted above, if the criteria for the success or 'realism' of union proposals are the capitalist ones of profitability, how radical is this type of union approach and how far can such initiatives be said to carry within them the seeds of a new order? The suspicion remains that the CFDT is downgrading its ambitions to the extent that most of its 'industrial' proposals are now little more than innovations in the restricted field of personnel policy, the major policy decisions still remaining with the managers.

Secondly, if even the ostensibly profitable suggestions are rebuffed by companies (the example of the Lucas plan in the UK is instructive here), how

successful are more radical proposals, those seeking to transform capitalist structures, likely to be, this side of a revolutionary situation?

Although often backed up with expert analysis of a company's operations, the CGT's proposals tend to be more simplistic, more direct than the CFDT's. If a whole group is in difficulty (Creusot-Loire, the steel groups, Technip), then direct state subsidy is demanded. The total volume of funding that might be required under such circumstances is barely considered: at the limit, the CGT will argue that enough money is being wasted on 'speculation' and dividend payments to the rich to fund industrial modernisation and retraining without the need for cutbacks in employment (see, for example, just about every editorial by Gérard Alezard in the CGT's quarterly Analyses et Documents Economiques).

The contribution of CGT Commission Executive member Oswald Calvetti to a June 30th 1983 press conference on Chapelle Darblay (contained in the CGT dossier on the Plan Franco-français) is a striking example of this approach which moves in a seamless way from global economic statistics to proposals on specific firms. Thus, beginning with the revelation that only 54 per cent of profits were (directly) reinvested in industry in 1982, Calvetti moves on to argue that money certainly exists to revive industry and link economic and social progress and that if the notion of profitability for its own pockets advocated by the patronat is disavowed, then the CGT's aim of investing for jobs will be seen as both

feasible and sound.

Eventually, Chapelle Darblay was saved by a massive infusion of government funding. At a financial level, disregarding for a moment the argument that paper is a strategic commodity, necessary for education, communication and so on and therefore vital for national independence, it is hard not to see this as a classic case of a government forced into the heavy subsidisation of a 'lame duck' under strong union and regional pressure<sup>(5)</sup>.

Given the level of funding allowed here, the notion of competitiveness seems completely absent (as rival French producers and Brussels complained) and one activist at Chapelle Darblay said the outcome demonstrated that 'une autre lecture de la crise' was possible. However, upon investigation, that outcome looks to have been more the result of political contingencies and unusually strong rapports de force than any new consensus or even any new approach to the problem of industrial restructuring and, these conditions rarely being met elsewhere, Chapelle Darblay can hardly be set up as a counter-model.

CGT activists believed they were being positive and realistic in their proposals and it is difficult to dispute the sincerity of their intentions although the comments of some suggested they were aware their proposals were unlikely to be realised even under a Left government:

On sait très bien, on se fait pas  
d'illusions. On sait aujourd'hui qu'on n'a  
pas changé fondamentalement de régime, de  
système social, politique. Donc les choses  
continuent comme avant. On se fait pas  
d'illusions sur ce qu'on pourrait nous donner  
à nous mais on sait qu'il faudra l'arracher  
(CGT, Kodak). (G)

The resignation of this activist helps explain one  
feature of practically all the CGT 'Plans' I came  
across. Even if a unit or perhaps the whole plant of a  
transnational group was indisputably loss-making, the  
plans still called for cross-subsidies within a group.  
Of course, there is a problem with transfer pricing and  
other practices which make it difficult to know just  
what part of an industrial group is making a profit or a  
loss: the point is that, for the CGT, there is always  
money available. Its proposals often go way beyond the  
criticism of such 'sharp practices' and, especially in  
their presentation if not in the talks which may come  
about, put the blame on the very principles of the  
capitalist system - production for profit, the payment  
of dividends, the need for companies to make operating  
surpluses - in such a way as to make them very difficult  
to bargain over.

This is made very clear in the vocabulary of CGT  
activists and pamphlets where the financial arguments  
share an undertone of moral outrage.

As a result, one might say that even if the CGT has begun to address questions of industry and finance in the current system, it does not always address them in an 'operationable' way: it seems that its plans are meant not to be bargained over so much as to mobilise the workforce. Underlying each is an anti-capitalist critique which may be couched in economic terms but which, for all that, in present circumstances, has a largely political and doctrinal function.

#### The Patronat and Union Proposals

A central test of the CFDT's post-1978 line was whether the employers would respond positively, whether its 'realistic' unionism would be met by a willingness to allow the unions a say in how their members lived their working lives. This, of course, was encouraged by Jean Auroux's ideas on 'citizenship' at work in the industrial relations legislation largely inspired by the trade unions.

However, the organised patronat seems to have responded to the CFDT recentrage and the Auroux laws only by accentuating the previous policy of individualising workplace relations, with the union role kept to a minimum. Certainly, for all the efforts of syndicats, Federations and other union bodies, there has been no opening-up of industrial strategy to the unions, either in private or public sector companies.

Of the companies I studied, SKF and Kodak bluntly refused any discussion of their industrial strategy;

Chapelle Darblay invited comments on the second recovery plan after industrial action had scuppered the first but still no real policy-making role for the unions; and Renault offered the unions an important role in its personnel policy but drew the line on any involvement in formulating industrial strategy on which long-term job prospects hinged.

Activists have not given up in the face of such refusals: they have continued their attempt to chip away at 'management prerogative'.

But the unions' failure could have wide-reaching implications. In the short-term, they fail to stem the tide of job losses and continue to lose members: indeed, they may have exacerbated this process by alienating those workers at the grassroots who were concerned, naturally enough, only with their own livelihood and backed more orthodox union demands and action. In the longer term, the union's failure to impose their own reading of the crisis leaves the way clear for employers, and governments, to impose their solutions which, in terms of the quantity and quality of jobs available, may not be in the interests of the nation's workforce.

#### Economic Imperatives and Social Needs

This leads to a more serious question about 'proposition force' unionism in general: just how far is it possible to truly integrate social, industrial and financial considerations?



The Socialists clearly decided that it was not possible when giving the go-ahead for the 'modernisation' of traditional industries such as shipbuilding from early 1984. The undivided aim became financial soundness and the employment problem was tackled as an ancillary matter. It may be that the French socialist government was more humane and more concerned about the impact of mass unemployment than governments in some other countries but its treatment of the problem was highly orthodox, from its early effort at job creation in the state sector to its support for the return home of immigrant workers.

Durand (in Casassus et al, 1984) argues that 'social' considerations were integrated into the first Steel Plan drawn up by the Socialists in 1982. Yet this was a wholly negative integration in that the authorities were concerned mainly to defuse in advance the violence always likely to well up in the militant regions such as Lorraine. As at Chapelle Darblay, job numbers were merely juggled to take into account the rapports de force. The plans were then deemed feasible on capitalist criteria, with massive initial subsidies, and the jobs 'reprieved' did not reflect any changed view on, for example, what efficiency meant.

One official of UGICT, the CGT cadres arm, told me she wanted her members to be 'associés à la conception (de la nouvelle technologie), maîtriser les processus dès son élaboration', not simply 'gérer ce qui est mis en place'. (H).

Yet there was no real debate on the conception of technology - putting human skills, capacities and needs at the heart of the problem and designing technology around that - during this period. In fact, the unions were probably even lagging behind the position reached by the CFDT in the late 1970s, epitomised by its arguments in Les Dégâts du Progrès: les travailleurs face au changement technique (1977).

In the same way, the view of the CGT (at Renault and SKF) that more workers should be hired and the accent put on quality ran counter to the cost-cutting logic of the companies, even though better quality was also stated to be a company aim.

There was little, if anything, from any of the unions on new products or 'socially useful production' which might not only soak up unemployment but also prepare the ground for the new type of development that both the CGT and CFDT loudly, but vaguely, call for. What is more, as one commentator has noted, the notion of 'social need' as expressed by unions can be rather artificial, constructed sometimes only to support employment proposals (Alain Lipietz in CRMSI, 1984: 72).

To sum up, the CFDT seemed to pitch its proposals on fairly traditional capitalist terrain, at least as regards its industrial content, while seeking a more acceptable social package which essentially only pushes back the limits of unbridled capitalism a bit further than they have already gone under pressure from unions

and progressive governments over the last century.

The CGI, on the other hand, was perhaps more intent on transforming the bases under which companies operate and thereby putting workers at the heart of industrial development, but it had little chance of succeeding under current socio-economic arrangements and that was probably understood by its leadership.

These observations will be enlarged in the penultimate chapter which sums up the changes and continuities in French trade unionism in the 1980s. Before that, there is a discussion of the important 'flexibility' negotiations which took place at the end of 1984 between the leaders of the employers' and workers' Confederations and in which some of the themes which emerged from the case studies were given an airing on a national stage.

#### NOTES

1. Reported in Liaisons Sociales, Document R621, 27th July 1983.

2. The CFDT (and the other Confederations, too) use the concept of the bassin, which might be translated as the 'travel to work area'. (See, for example, Pierre Héritier, CFDT national officer in charge of economic policy, in Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2000, 19th January 1984).

3. See Autrand (1987) for a study of union strategy on working time.

4. See the studies of INSEE and the Ministère des

Affaires Sociales, as reported in Liaisons Sociales, R637, 26th September 1984.

5. The subsidy was ended by the new Right-wing government in 1986 and denounced as a misuse of public funds. (Le Monde, 3rd June 1986).

#### TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

(A) 'I don't know how much the proposals in our programme would cost the capitalists and I have to admit I'm not that bothered.' (Mouriaux, 1982: 182).

(B) 'We've always put forward proposals but now there's figures and things, it's more serious.' (CGT, SKF).

(C) 'It's no good trying to deceive the workers. If a firm is viable, it's viable within the current system.' (CFDT national officer).

(D) 'For us, it's not trade unionism. You've got a loss of jobs and a loss of purchasing power. That reduces the role of the union to zero.' (CFDT Kodak).

(E) '... another landmark on the way to defining new answers to the recession. One of those initiatives which lead the union movement into a true cultural revolution, making it move beyond a purely defensive role.' (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2035, 11th October 1984).

(F) 'If there's a crisis of the capitalist model, of capitalist logic, that implies new responsibilities for the union. In a way, it is a question of - and this is the direction the CGT is moving in - gradually taking over areas which up till now were the preserve of the bosses. These are the fields of management, the company, decisions on production, the management of the economy, the aims of production.' (CGT, in CRMSI, 1984: 76).

(G) 'We know all that, we're not under any illusions. We know now that we haven't fundamentally changed the régime, the social and political system... So things go on as before. We've got no illusions about what we might get - but we do know that we'll have to fight for it.' (CGT, Kodak).

(H) '...associated with the conception (of new technology), in charge of the procedure of elaborating it, not simply "managing what has been installed".' (UGICT official).

## 8. THE NATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS ON FLEXIBILITY

As unemployment kept on rising, moving through two million in 1982, and the long-awaited recovery in the US and other western economies failed to materialise, the Left government in France was forced into a series of retreats.

The decision to concentrate on restoring the financial health of the nationalised industries was the most visible sign of the change of tack, not least because it threatened to add directly to the numbers out of work. Yet the about-turn on conditions of employment - the abandonment of Auroux's vision of 'reconstituting the workplace community' - was perhaps more symbolic of the change of direction, epitomising the transformation of the Socialist Party into something more akin to a typical European Social Democratic grouping, concentrating on the socially equitable management of the economy rather than its transformation '1'.

In the process, the question of manpower flexibility split the labour movement, dividing those who rejected any loosening of legal safeguards from those who were prepared to risk some concessions in the belief that this would aid the development of social dialogue, paving the way for a wider spread of employment opportunities and perhaps giving the unions more credibility in this field.

By 1983, the employers were putting pressure - both

publicly and more discreetly through renewed informal contacts - on the government to adapt the employment legislation and ordonnances introduced during its first year in office. (The CNPF had probably realised that its early onslaught on Auroux had been counter-productive, especially when the new laws failed to fetter French managers in the way the employers' organisations had hyperbolically predicted).

At the same time, the unions were calling for talks on new technology and working hours. The employers would only agree to negotiate if their own demands were also put on the agenda.

The government preferred to see areas of agreement actively drawn up by the 'social partners' rather than court further unpopularity from one side or the other by imposing fresh legislation and so the flexibility negotiations - aimed at revising a centre-piece of its early reforms - went ahead with its blessing.

The talks began in May 1984 but most of the significant action occurred in the last quarter of that year amidst great media interest. A 'protocol' finally emerged in the early hours of Sunday 16th December. (The protocol is reproduced in Droit Social, 2, 1985).

#### The 'Flexibility' Protocol<sup>(2)</sup>

The protocol began with a preamble in which the parties asserted their common will to safeguard jobs, described as one of their priorities. Agreement between employers and workers' organisations was seen as the

best way of responding to problems thrown up by technological change, international competition and the economic recession.

Section One dealt with the introduction of new technology, providing for negotiations in the industrial branches and in firms to discuss the likely impact on jobs, skills, salaries, conditions and training requirements. Henceforth, a plan d'adaptation would be negotiated 'upstream' of the plan social which is required under the terms of the 1969 national agreement on job security and subsequent legislation in the event of planned redundancies.

Section Two related to working time - in particular the possibility of more flexible rotas and the further extension of exemptions from legal restrictions already allowed by the Code du Travail under certain circumstances. The issue of working hours calculated on an annual basis was specifically mentioned. No new reduction in work time was explicitly envisaged: indeed, the final clause of this section stressed the need to master costs and highlighted the danger of any reduction eating up productivity gains which might be better allocated to investment or used to hold down prices.

Section Three dealt with alterations to the procedures employers had to follow in making redundancies. It represented a compromise between existing delays and the employers' call for outright elimination of the Labour Inspectors' approval though the employers' position was reaffirmed in an extract



from the minutes of the negotiations which was appended to the final Protocol.

The need for a plan social would have been restricted under the agreement to those firms where more than ten redundancies were announced in any thirty-day period, though any plan would now have to explore the possibility of reducing job loss through a reduction in working hours and external as well as internal transfers.

Section Four would have introduced delays before the election of workplace representatives when legal thresholds were reached, restricted the categories of workers taken into account for the calculations and limited the number of meetings. One clause indicated that negotiations might be possible on adapting representation in smaller firms - a very tentative acknowledgement of the CFDT's support for délégués inter-entreprise or commissions paritaires professionnelles.

This section also adapted the conditions of payment of certain para-fiscal contributions relating to public transport and so on.

Section Five would have expanded the range of cases in which temporary and contract workers could be employed and the possible length of their employment. (The Socialists had introduced restrictions in this area in February and March 1982 in order to prevent abuses they saw as leading to a growing précarisation, or destabilisation, of employment conditions. The

ordonnances of the period strengthened the rights of temporary and part-time workers).

It is immediately clear that this list reflected the agenda of the employers' side in the negotiations and was a de facto acceptance that a major bar to recruitment was the rigidity of labour law - the costs inflicted on the employer by the requirement to have worker representatives with paid time off once a certain total of employees was reached, the inability to make redundancies when required, the restrictions on the hiring of short term labour, and so on.

During the negotiations the CNPF introduced, with something of a fanfare, the idea of emplois nouveaux à contraintes allégées (ENCA): in return for the elimination of the Labour Inspectorate's approval of redundancies and the non-inclusion of new recruits into 'threshold' calculations, the CNPF said it could guarantee the creation of 471,000 new jobs (Le Monde, 5th July 1984). This claim convinced few and fed suspicions that the CNPF was more concerned with scoring ideological points than easing unemployment. The proposal was eventually shelved, in the form that it was initially presented, but the final protocol was very much in the same spirit.

This aggressive CNPF stance was perhaps the principal reason why the CGT, throughout the period of negotiation, showed itself hostile to the venture. In

its conception of union-employer relations, the union makes demands of the employer. Here, the reverse was happening: the employers were setting out their own revendications and, what is more, these entailed the abandonment of many of the protections and guarantees won by the workers over the preceding fifty years.

Like the CNPF, the CGT saw the protocol as an indivisible whole and was therefore ill-disposed to highlight particular sections which might seem favourable to the workers. Thus, negotiations ahead of the introduction of new technology did not impress the CGT because the flexibility in the use of labour that the employers wanted to accompany the new techniques was already won in the remaining clauses.

For the CGT, the only novelty in the current crisis is that technology is evolving more rapidly than ever before; there has been a qualitative leap with information technology and microelectronics, which necessitates a quicker return on investments, a greater facility to adapt working time (and working lives) to machines and the ability to shed 'excess' staff as financial requirements dictate.

The CGT was not opposed to change, even less to the introduction of new techniques, but it saw in the employers' offensive a mystification of technological advance: it regarded this as a social process and the benefits therefore ought to devolve to society as a whole, with the aim of providing stable, interesting, skilled jobs for all and using technology to fulfil

social need. This would only be possible if the workers had some control over both the use and the conception of technology: the Protocol only envisaged negotiations over its consequences (conditions, training and so on) after it had been developed according to capitalist requirements.

The CGT sought here, as elsewhere, to link economic efficiency and social progress. Its own concept of 'flexibility' involved mobility between classifications and even between firms but with a guarantee of employment for each worker. (The CGT's own proposals, not discussed as such, are contained in Le Peuple, 1182, 15th November 1984). In fact, clause 3.1.1 of the Protocol moved in this direction with the requirement that employers canvass for replacement jobs in other firms in their 'social plans' ahead of redundancies, while clause 1.1 stated firmly:

Tous les efforts doivent tendre à ce que  
les mutations technologiques ne soient pas  
seulement subies mais constituent un des  
éléments du progrès social. (A)

The absence of any concrete advances in the Protocol obviously led the CGT to be suspicious of such pious pronouncements, but even more crucially, it deplored the whole idea of negotiating over avantages acquis, gains won in the past which were not to be bargained over, whatever the changed circumstances.

In this respect, it took a quite different tack to that of the CFDT for whom the form of the negotiations was as important - and as welcome - as the actual content of the Protocol and whose Bureau National initially recommended signature. As noted in Chapter Three, it has banked a great deal on negotiating concrete advances for the workers and has been prepared in recent years to accept some 'give and take' (donnant-donnant). Much has hinged on the response of the employers and a national protocol signed by the CNPF, CGPME and four of the five major Confedertions would, in its view, have breathed fresh life into the bargaining process, especially in the area of working time which is so central to the CFDT's programme for jobs and for better conditions.

Furthermore, the CFDT was prepared to take a gamble (the word pari was used by an official) on the Protocol leading to employment opportunities, through a 'social dynamic' unleashed by the negotiations as much as by any single mechanism such as the shorter working week. The premise of the Confederation leadership is that 'la pire des précarités', the worst labour market position by far, is being in the dole queue. Some of the leaders go even further, arguing that people nowadays actively seek variable working patterns and may even choose to work, say, for just eight or nine months in a year. From here, the acceptance of looser legislation covering temporary and contract work is not so shocking.

Another positive aspect for the CFDT was the

possible inroad allowed into representation in the smaller firms which currently constitute a desert for all the Confederations.

The projected discussions over new technology were also seen as positive, as was the requirement to look at a reduction in working time and external job opportunities ahead of any redundancies. Against this, the clause referring to the need to master costs in the section on working time, even if it was an improvement on the initial CNPF wording, would surely have had a blocking effect in plant level talks.

Force Ouvrière, like the CFDT, was looking for a relaunch of collective negotiations to emerge from these discussions. A majority of the FO negotiators was also in favour of signing until it became clear that a sizeable number of FO militants and Federations were opposed.

The main objection was the assault on legislative safeguards and the broader questioning of acquis which FO is as reluctant to bargain over as the CGT:

Cela touche au code du travail. Nos militants n'en veulent pas. C'est théologique. Je ne peux pas passer par-dessus la tête des militants. Nous sommes une organisation démocratique. (André Bergeron in Le Monde, 22nd December 1984). (B)

Recalling his words to the November 1984 Conference, Bergeron wrote in FO Hebdo, No. 1822, 9th January 1985:

... si nous étions ouverts à certaines 'mises à jour', nous n'entendions pas pour autant laisser passer par-dessus bord la réglementation du travail. (C)

That Conference was fresh in the militants' minds and it is surprising that signing was even considered given some of the statements made there. Bergeron himself had complained that the employers were 'mounting an assault on social conquests' and in the important Résolution Sociale, FO denounced 'les projets du patronat qui visent à libérer les employeurs de toutes contraintes légales ou conventionnelles relatives à la faculté d'embaucher ou de licencier'. (D)

As regards the fifth section of the protocol relating to contract, temporary and part-time work, the Conference could not have been more explicit:

A ce sujet, la CGT-FO considère que les dispositions légales et réglementaires existantes constituent, pour les salariés, une protection minimale qui ne saurait être remise en question. (Résolution Sociale). (E)

Enormous deference is shown to André Bergeron by FO militants yet even he - and he apparently favoured

signature despite the self-congratulatory tones of his FO Hebdo piece of 9th January 1985 after the Confederation eventually refused - was unable to reconcile the mood of the November conference, quite in tune with FO culture, with the content of the December protocol.

If FO was favourable to the negotiations over the introduction of new technology, most other aspects of the protocol troubled it, not least the clause relating to the annualisation of working time, described by one official in an interview as 'une idée extrêmement dangereuse': the idea of getting workers to work longer when production (or the weather, or whatever) required and less during slacker periods, perhaps by enforced holidays, was disruptive both of workers' lives and of established agreements and therefore unacceptable on both counts.

As for the 'threshold effect', the same official was in tune with many other unionists and external observers in his opinion that this posed only a 'psychological' block on employers who were thinking of hiring workers, not any substantial financial handicap. (An INSEE study cited in Le Monde of 5th March 1985 appears to bear this out).

The CFTC was just as hesitant as FO about signing even though its chief negotiator maintained in an interview that the Code du Travail was rigid and some loosening of restrictions, on contract work, for



instance, would have been acceptable.

However, it was not prepared to see the 'precarious' work form become the norm, as it was in some branches, such as commerce, and it was worried that the Protocol allowed widespread exemptions from legal provisions in workplace agreements in a way previously only possible through branch agreements (see clause 2.3). The CFTC, like FO in particular, is wary of innovatory deals at workplace level, preferring negotiations in the industrial branches where the unions have a more solid presence and structure.

Finally, the CFTC, because of its confessional doctrine, was concerned at certain provisions of the work time section, particularly the prospect of Sunday working becoming commonplace and of the special conditions attached to female employment being discarded.

The CGC was the only one of the Confederations which said it would sign the protocol. One official opined that workers needed to adapt to new market conditions and that the Auroux legislation exacerbated the rigidity in the French labour market which was due in large measure to the legal framework.

In fact, certain clauses of the protocol were highly advantageous to the CGC's constituency. Clause 1.6, for instance, stressed the central position of the encadrement in the introduction of new technology, while the annualisation of work time would have been

attractive to a category not paid for overtime yet generally working longer hours than the average employee (Groux, 1983: 42-4).

The CGC activists I met were happy with their Confederation's decision; some were enthusiastic about the whole concept of flexibility:

C'est notre temps qui veut ça, il faut adapter. (CGC, Chapelle Darblay). (F)

#### The Rejection of the Protocol

It was clear well before the negotiations ended that the CGT would not be signing under any circumstances and it managed to mobilise its militants with more success than in most other campaigns of the post-1981 period. This certainly played a part in the subsequent negative decisions of the CFDT and FO - not only the thrust of the CGT argument but the realisation that any success at firm level in particular would have to be won in the face of CGT opposition. In this light, the relatively positive aspects of the protocol looked even more slight to many activists.

However, there were more fundamental reasons for the opposition within FO and the CFDT and it is necessary to stress these since they impinge on the capacity for change within each Confederation and have a bearing on the likely course of French industrial relations in the future.

Both FO and the CFDT still espouse a class analysis

of society. Even if both nowadays place an emphasis on negotiation, the dominant ideology among militants still sees conditions of employment as resting on victories snatched by the labour movement from hostile employers and to be built upon, not used as bargaining fodder. The defence of avantages acquis is sacred in FO and the CGT and that attitude is also common at grassroots level in the CFDT.

Leading lights in the CFDT (including their main negotiators in these talks, Jean Kaspar and Jean-Paul Jacquier) would call this attitude 'archaic' and implicitly accept the CNPF analysis on the 'rigidities' of French labour law. The thrust of their approach is to bargain away some of these 'outmoded' restrictions against a stronger union input (especially in smaller firms) into industrial life, attracting members to the union by offering them immediate advantages which in turn increases the union's capacity to win further advantages.

The worry of many activists (and shared by outside observers such as René Mouriaux in Intersocial, No. 110, February 1985) was that the unions favourable to signing seemed to be acquiescing to the CNPF's definition of economic and social realities. The final protocol thus seemed to enshrine a reading of the employment problem which suggested that unemployment could be largely attributed to constraints imposed by social legislators on the entrepreneur. Even if certain of the Confederations - the CFDT, CFTC and CGC - conceded that

this was partly true, their overall analysis pointed to the need for economic reflation and greater investment to bring down unemployment, yet there was no quid pro quo in the December 16th document, nothing positive for the militants to seize on. Above all, once the CNFF's whimsical figure of 471,000 new jobs had been discredited, there was neither any real commitment nor any serious estimate of the likely effect of the measures on employment.

As a result, this gave the initiative to those inside each Confederation who were unconvinced of the employers' good faith (such as the FO official who described 'flexibility' to me as 'une vaste entreprise idéologique du patronat').

Furthermore - and this was even more serious for the CFDT - activists that I interviewed from all the Confederations appeared sceptical about the notion that the way out of the crisis lay in sharing out the work that currently exists. Edmond Maire's concept <sup>le 14</sup> of 'new solidarities' (see Le Monde, 2nd and 3rd November 1984) has proved unattractive to a workforce seeking more, not less, job security, and the idea that to have a job and a steady income is somehow a privilege is <sup>34</sup>badly received by the average member - not least when it comes from a union leader...

So, finally, a majority of union activists decided that the Protocol set out a very unequal bargain and, only too aware of the traditional anti-unionism of the

patronat, many were convinced that such innovations as the 'plans d'adaptation' would mean little in an actual redundancy situation.

But the issues which were at the heart of these negotiations will not disappear simply because the agreement was not formalised. It is clear that the concept of 'employment' is changing rapidly and employers feel confident enough -- especially after the change of government -- to push ahead with their experiments with or without the approval of the Confederations.

The activists I met were generally aware of the need for more flexibility in production -- but at the same time they demanded more control over new forms of work organisation, better retraining and, above all, a certain stability of employment within the new framework of flexibility, be it within the firm, the group or even a geographical area.

Yet even when guarantees of this order were on offer at Renault, sections of the labour movement rejected them as insufficient, not fully allaying the fears of the existing workforce. The flexibility agreement was hardly in the same category, all the concessions seeming to come from the workers' side, but, together, these two cases illustrate the problems confronting union leaders who are trying to come to terms with a new economic environment while retaining the support of members, without neglecting the needs of the wider workforce, including those currently unemployed.

French unions have moved a long way in the last decade but old attitudes, conditioned by many more decades of employer hostility and the consequent need for binding legislation, are hard to break down - and the patronat has not always acted in a way likely to encourage the process.

#### NOTES

1. The transformation was formalised after the defeat in the 1986 elections. (See, for example, The Guardian, 22nd April 1986; and Le Monde, 27-8th April 1986).

2. During fieldwork, I was able to interview members of all the Confederal teams for these negotiations, including the leaders in the case of the CFDT (Jean Kaspar) and the CFTC (Jean Gruat).

#### TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

(A) 'Every effort should be made to ensure that technological change is not simply 'put up with' but that it actively constitutes one of the elements of social progress.' (Flexibility Protocol).

(B) 'That affects industrial relations law. Our people don't want anything to do with that. That's what we stand for. I can't do something over the heads of our active members. We're a democratic organisation.' (Bergeron).

(C) '...if we were open to certain 'clarifications', we didn't intend throwing overboard workplace legislation.' (Bergeron).

(D) '... those employer schemes which aim at freeing management from any legal or negotiated limits to their ability to hire and fire.' (Résolution Sociale, FO Conference).

(E) 'As regards this, FO considers that the existing legal provisions constitute, for the workers, a basic minimum protection that should not be questioned.' (Ibid).

(F) 'You have to move with the times, you must adapt.' (CGC, Chappelle Darblay).

## 9. CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN FRENCH TRADE UNIONISM

Although May 13th 1981 was a major date in political history, it would be misleading to see it as pivotal in terms of French trade unionism. Other dates or periods may have more justifiable claim: the mid 1970s, for example, when the rising number of company failures and redundancies first obliged unionists to look seriously at questions of management and finance; 1978 and the 'Steel Plans' prepared by the CGT and CFDT; the unravelling of the Union de la Gauche from 1977 and the consequent political debacle of 1978 when hopes of a Left government foundered after disputes over the Common Programme; and, not least, the recentrage of the CFDT in 1977-8 which spelt the end of any 'unity in action' with the CGT and opened the way for a serious 'proposition force unionism' as well as the revival of contractual relations with the employers' Confederations and a possible rapprochement with the reformist trade unions.

However, the period from May 1981 to March 1986 allowed certain lines of union thought or action to develop and consolidate, while at the same time laying bare the ambiguities in the programmes of the CFDT and CGT in particular. The most significant of these developments are discussed here.

### Trade Unions and Company Management

The most important development was a growing



interest in the running of firms and the proposals regularly made in this area by all of the Confederations except FO. During the 1981-6 period, most union activity seemed to centre on the level of the establishment or the company and, perhaps because mobilisation was so weak, the unions generally refrained from advancing broader industrial branch level plans.

Here at least the change of government was of obvious importance. Under the Auroux legislation, militants were given greater access to company information and more paid time-off and resources to exploit it. Furthermore, in the early months anyway, they were hopeful of getting a sympathetic reception if they took their proposals to any of the Ministries where unionists had been taken on as advisers and officials, while the whole climate of opinion was receptive to new initiatives on employment.

The CGT and CFDT are present in more firms than the other Confederations and they were therefore most involved in the new development, though with significant differences.

One such difference involved the perspectives each Confederation saw opening up as a result of their interventions. This distinction was not clear cut among the activists who tended to have limited ambitions:

Le seul intérêt dans notre histoire,  
c'est de trouver du travail... C'est pas la

co-gestion! Si l'on avait voulu la gestion de l'entreprise, on aurait fait un SCOP<sup>(1)</sup> dès le départ. (CGT, SKF). (A)

Notre objective est à dire: il y a un certain nombre de fabrications qui sont abandonnées et un certain nombre d'autres qui dans un avenir à court ou moyen terme est encore rentable. Les Américains nous les ont retirées (et) il faut essayer de créer des activités nouvelles... C'est uniquement dans cette objective-là - pas du tout une histoire de co-gestion. (CFDT, Kodak). (B)

However, the difference was marked among officials of the two Confederations. The CFDT was eager to be recognised as an interlocuteur valable of the employers and sought to find areas of negotiation and structures which would give it a permanent means of influencing management. The content and process of making proposals was a step to this goal.

CGT officials, on the other hand, were aiming explicitly at reining back the power of employers and imposing new guidelines on them. The idea that employers might be brought to the negotiating table to bargain away their prerogatives seemed ridiculous to the CGT and their proposals were often aimed at the government (a call for intervention and funding) as much as at the employer.

The CFDT was much more prepared to bargain and compromise, accepting, for example, less rigid rotas if there was a reduction in time worked. It accepted the need to act within economic constraints though it still claimed to want to change the nature of these constraints: it tried to persuade employers, for example, that training ought to be treated as a long term investment not as a cost to be lumped in with taxes and other para-fiscal contributions.

Confederation officials asserted that the autogestionnaire ideals which had guided their theory and practice during the 1970s were not up to tackling the immediate social and economic problems of the 1980s and had therefore been 'put into cold storage'. Objectively, this put the CFDT in the 'reformist' camp, as officials admitted (while still claiming that the CFDT's vision of society was transformative) and its evolution ruled out any revival of the 'unity in action' which had been so strong a feature of union advance from the mid-1960s (Dubois, 1984).

Although the concrete proposals made by a CGT syndicat may not always differ greatly from those of their CFDT colleagues, the CGT seems to exhibit a refusal to compromise which inevitably means that its plans are only likely to be influential after a confrontation (as at Chapelle Darblay). It rejects the constraints imposed by the capitalist economy (above all, it rejects the concept of 'overmanning') and many of the features of its 'new criteria of management' are

therefore impractical this side of a fundamental change in the political and economic system.

Like the CFDT, it may try to show that certain changes could be profitable in the longer term, but it also juxtaposes what is 'profitable' for society as a whole with what is profitable on a balance sheet. Thus, its proposals centring around 'franco-français' contracts between companies are justified on social as well as economic grounds (they 'provide jobs for French workers as well as help the trade balance'). At the same time, the CGT can partly deflect criticism that it is unrealistically trying to set up 'islands of socialism in a capitalist sea' by arguing that contracts between the state sector and smaller private firms can lay the basis for an economy based on cooperation not competition.

However, all the case-study evidence presented here, together with the public statements of its leaders and press, suggest that the CGT has not yet abandoned maximalism: it is still geared towards the overthrow of capitalism.

What is fascinating is that this maximalism has been expressed, in the 1980s, in a quite novel form, for essentially political reasons. From 1981, any CGT mobilisation explicitly aimed at political change (which from 1977-78 had most clearly meant support for the PCF) was naturally halted; and even when illusions evaporated from mid-1982, slogans for political change would have been unlikely to rally either those who supported the

Socialists or those demoralised by the whole political process. Hence, the emphasis was switched to economic policy - calls for Keynesian reflation and protectionism at the national level and, more importantly, 'new criteria' at firm level. These criteria may appear closer to the realities of the workplace - and almost certainly they would be to the advantage of the workers - but in reality the CGT is making demands on companies which are not feasible in the current system. Its plans have a mobilising function rather than a practical one and, as in the past, their success in raising class consciousness is just as important as any actual achievement in defending jobs: thus, short-term and medium-term aims come together, though the political strategy frequently undermines the immediate effort of defending jobs because of the unchanged reluctance to compromise and bargain in the sense that it might be understood in the UK, for example.

In short, the demands for 'new criteria of management' reflect the transposition onto a formally economic plane of maximalist demands that are, for the time being, untenable in the political sphere.

Evidence that the situation in each company is not the most important consideration for CGT activists is found in the similarity of form taken by CGT proposals - retraining, reduced hours with no loss of pay, deals with French clients and suppliers, no job loss - as well as the similarity of action - referenda of the workforce and wider community, publicity stunts, questions asked

by sympathisers in the National Assembly - and the vocabulary in which they are expressed. A pattern seems to emerge of worker discontent being translated into propositions which fit a certain prescribed CGT pattern and which, in the final analysis, seem to have a mobilising and ideological function rather than any realistic chance of influencing decisions or being negotiated over.

If the line adopted by the CGT may superficially appear to follow that advocated by Jean-Louis Moynot (1982 and 1979), the fact that Moynot was squeezed out of the Bureau Confédéral for his troubles serves to underline the above analysis: Moynot called for negotiations in good faith and (after 1981) for a unified approach by the Confederations in conjunction with the Socialist-led government (Le Monde, 6th December 1983) but CGT tactics precluded both these policies. The CGT refuses the idea of making concessions on workplace practices in order to gain incremental increases in power and revised advantages relating to employment conditions: Moynot's resignation from the Bureau Confédéral stands as a symbol of the strategic continuity of CGT policy despite a real change in tactics.

After the change of government in 1986, this became clearer. Although it still put forward its own proposals when closures were threatened, reasoned 'counter-plans' seemed less central to CGT action and there even seemed to be a throwback to the oppositionist rhetoric which,

under the Socialists, tended to have a more positive veneer, at least.

Thus, in the first post-election CCN meeting, Louis Viannet, a PCF hard-liner, presented the report and stated in particular:

Pour la CGT, discussion et négociation ne peuvent avoir de sens et surtout de portée que conçues comme un moment de l'action, de mobilisation (Le Monde, 26th April 1986). (C)

This refusal of dialogue outside of conflict contrasts with the approaches to management and Ministers which were standard during the first years of the Left government. Furthermore, Viannet was explicitly rejecting the recent more positive line when he called on the activists to:

... reconquérir, au sens le plus noble du terme, la fonction revendicative comme raison d'être fondamentale de l'organisation syndicale. (D)

The change in attitude was clear at least from the SKF episode: similar violent, high profile action has been taken subsequently by Renault workers who, along with sympathisers, fought a running battle throughout France to stop machinery being transferred to a Renault factory in Spain and by Normed shipbuilding workers

threatened with redundancy who cut railway lines to publicise their fight.

The aim is two-fold: to distinguish the combative CGT from the other 'collaborationist' unions, including the CFDT, and to highlight the rejection of 'capitalist solutions' to the crisis.

This recent development lends support to the analysis above, that the CGT's move onto management terrain signalled only a tactical change determined by the political events of 1981 and not a major strategic overhaul to compare with the CFDT's recentrage.

#### The Rejection of Responsibility

However, there exists a contradiction within the concept of 'proposition force unionism' even as it is practised by the CFDT. This contradiction - the refusal of any responsibility for the management of companies - can be traced back to an anarcho-syndicalist refusal of capitalist structures and is fully assumed by FO, but it sits uneasily beside demands for a say in industrial and financial decisions<sup>(2)</sup>.

As a description of this attitude, Adam et al's image remains pertinent despite the vastly different context and changed tactics:

On tire sur le pianiste jusqu'à ce qu'il  
joue juste, mais on ne le remplace pas. (Adam  
et al, 1972: 77-8). (E)



The underlying fear is of being integrated into the capitalist system, or of simply being seen to accept the (capitalist) rules of the game. If some of the more 'ultra' of the CFDT modernists no longer see that as a constraint, their poor showing in the elections to the CFDT's ruling bodies in June 1985 was evidence that the grassroots did not sanction this line (Raybould, 1985a) and meetings of the policy-making Conseil Confédéral National see constant friction between competing viewpoints, notably those who would like to see the CFDT evolve into a kind of 'modernist' FO, a contract signer not frightened of taking gambles with acquis, and those who accept the need to update the programme of the 1970s but want to retain a radical, socialist perspective. On industrial matters, the latter group decries the modernists for, in its view, practically condemning some older sectors of the economy in advance, and almost in their entirety; while politically, the ambition only to correct the worst features of capitalism merely buttresses the system. The fiercest critics of the leadership line (in particular, the UR of Lower Normandy) find the Confederation guilty of 'neo-liberal deviancy' for accepting the employers' economic solutions under the guise of responding to a perceived shift in the aspirations of the working population.

At the June 1985 Conference, a form of 'progressive pragmatism' seemed to emerge (Raybould, 1985a) but concrete differences over values and aims inevitably persist and even what is labelled 'primary

anti-capitalism' (strong enough to preclude any compromise) remains in pockets.

However, the rejection of responsibility seems to be shared to a greater or lesser extent by all sides. In an interview, a Confederation official in the Economics Department accepted that this attitude had historical roots and noted that the present period was 'une phase ambiguë qui ne peut pas durer'. In this transitional phase, the unions demand a say in determining strategy but want no part in the day to day running (la gestion quotidienne) of the firm which would compromise their defensive function. In the near term, then, the CFDT demanded information and real consultation which might involve the discussion of its own proposals.

This leaves obscure the precise conditions under which the syndicat would be able to reconcile participation in management and the defense of the work force. FO argues that the two roles are antinomic: the hesitancy of the CFDT when confronted with the problem may help to explain the workforce's inability to grasp its line on occasions and the relative success of FO's straightforward defense of immediate interests.

The CGT's position is also clear and again reinforces the interpretation of its intentions offered above: both militants and officials state that they seek workers' control but that this is impossible under the present system. One official, who regretted the lack of interest shown by some militants in management matters, was nonetheless adamant that 'le syndicat n'a pas pour

vocation de gérer' (F) and that that was the responsibility of the patron alone.

This official argued that the union existed to defend the workers; to do this, it now felt it had to intervene in company management but that did not entail any responsibility for a company's performance. Presumably that still held even if the employer actually acted on union proposals.

Essentially, for this CGT official:

Le patron reste maître des décisions de gestion, mais pas des choix de critères de gestion. (G)

That is, management should retain managerial control but only within an overall strategy which is influenced by the union and which is therefore an expression of the rapports de force.

The view that unions could not be fully implicated in day to day decision making in the capitalist firm was shared by all the CGT activists I met:

On ne prend pas de décisions. On fait des propositions, on aide, si vous voulez, avec la connaissance qu'on a de l'entreprise, et des problèmes... Les problèmes individuels sont en rapport avec les problèmes de l'entreprise. Mais on ne se place pas sur le plan politique dans le sens où on ne prend

pas de décisions. On n'a pas de  
responsabilité dans les décisions. (CGT,  
Kodak). (H)

The replies of both officials and grassroots activists in both the formerly 'revolutionary' Confederations were frequently evasive or elliptical on this point. Although they were getting involved and saw the need to do so, they found it hard to reconcile this with anti-capitalist dogma.

At this theoretical level, then, there seems to be something of an objective overlap between the position of the CGT and that of the CFDT though the formula of 'conflictual co-operation' espoused by some in the latter Confederation would be unacceptable to the CGT.

There was nonetheless a real difference when it came to translating the evolving doctrine into concrete action. The CFDT now argues that socialism is not for tomorrow: given that premise, a socialist trade unionist has to question what his role should be: Act with a view to preparing the ground for 'real' socialism? Or accept the reality of certain political and economic constraints and try to influence crucial decisions being taken now in a socialist direction?

The CGT has chosen the first route, the CFDT the second, which is littered with traps the Confederation has not yet found a way round - not least, how to reconcile reformist action and 'revolutionary' rhetoric and doctrine.

### The Changing Nature of Employment

A central test for the CFDT will be whether it actually succeeds in its stated aim of changing the nature of work and employment ('Changer l'Emploi') without changing power relations within society.

One theme of both the cases and the national debate over flexibility concerned the type of job the unions ought to be fighting for. The same debate is taking place in Britain and other industrialised countries as the relative importance of the service sector, female employment, part-time work, contract work and so on grows.

The CGT begins each fight on the basis of no job loss, no surrender of acquis: in each firm studied, CGT activists noted that their workforce enjoyed better than average conditions due to battles fought in the past and in each there was at least the suspicion, sometimes clear evidence, that closures or the shedding of labour was partly designed to hit the power of the unions.

The best of the social plans on offer - at Renault - offered retraining and, in the first stages, continued employment within the group: this was rejected by the CGT, possibly for political reasons, but also because even here it felt the new jobs would not be secure unless accompanied by an industrial strategy which reflected its own reflationary priorities.

At Kodak, the alternative jobs on offer were rejected by the CGT and CFDT for similar reasons and the

CGT took the same line at Chapelle Darblay and SKF. FO, on the other hand, generally restricted its brief to the immediate situation and, once it had negotiated the best social deal possible, did not seem to reflect on the longer-term implications.

The CGC activists encountered were more varied in their opinions: at Chapelle Darblay, though, the view prevailed that a worker, given the proper training which was his due, ought to be able to fend for himself in the labour market.

The CFDT and CGT were also insistent on the need for retraining but tended to demand guaranteed jobs at the end, otherwise the courses represented little more than stages-parking, 'antechambers to the dole office' and therefore no real solution to the employment problem.

FO, picking up on Dalle's prescriptions for the car industry, said it wanted the 'jobs for life' of Japanese car workers (Le Monde, 3rd November 1984). Ironically, FO would probably find it easier than the other Confederations to live with a dual labour market along Japanese lines, with a secure core and a 'periphery' of highly insecure posts in small component and service companies, because of its single-minded attachment to the defence of acquis where it is implanted and its lack of any 'social project'.

It lambasts the CFDT for its 'trendy' preoccupations and its neglect of the bread and butter issues - pay and basic conditions. Here it is joined by the CGT but other commentators, too (for example, René Mouriaux in

Intersocial, 110, February 1985; and various contributors to the non-aligned grassroots magazine, Résister) have argued that the CFDT has been too quick to accomodate economic trends and the priorities of the patronat which both follow and underpin them rather than argue for working class solutions.

For the moment, the Confederation's pragmatism seems to have the upper hand on the radicalism and managment seems to be gaining the flexibility it needs without any quid pro quo in terms of greater worker control of his environment and work organisation, more input into policy, consultation, and so on.

#### New Solidarities and Old Divisions

The uneven nature of the compromise was what eventually caused activists to reject the flexibility protocol of December 1984 (Raybould, 1985b; Mouriaux, 1985). The debate then, and indeed for much of the 1980s, has centred on the notion of solidarity.

The CGT tends to use the term in a fairly orthodox way, meaning workers coming together to save jobs and safeguard conditions, both locally and within industries. However, as the case studies and other examples demonstrate, the form of solidarity action proposed by the CGT has widened to include, for example, the presentation of industrial plans grouping products from separate firms. Solidarity now has a more positive sense, meaning more than the old-style street demonstration and contributions to fighting funds.

For the CFDT leadership, the term solidarity implies responsible union action to help those who do not have a job - and even a highly precarious situation is preferable to the despair of the dole queue. As one national officer stated to me:

La pire des précarités, c'est le chômage. (I)

Coupled with an acceptance of financial constraints and market place 'realities', this has led to activists having to accept the need on occasions for job cuts or reduced hours with no compensation to keep a company afloat while at the same time calling for aid for retraining and alternative opportunities in the same region. This was the stance of the CFDT Union Locale in Rouen during the Chapelle Darblay dispute though it failed to convince all its own members at the works, those called upon to forfeit their own jobs in the name of financial redressment.

Elsewhere, CFDT leader Edmond Maire misread the mood of his own members in the civil service when, in the name of his nouvelles solidarités, he refused to back their strike over pay in March 1984. He later denied calling them 'privileged' but he was adamant that those in secure, relatively well-paid jobs had to accept certain sacrifices to help the less fortunate.

In the private sector, too, the CFDT line on pay and work-sharing caused problems for activists - witness this comment from an IBM worker after the CFDT lost



ground in DP elections:

Il est difficile de parler du partage du travail et de la priorité aux bas salaires dans une usine où le salaire moyen avoisine 13,000 francs par mois... (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 2003, February 9th 1984). (J)

Clearly, there is a certain contradiction between, on the one hand, accepting constraints and ordering priorities within them and, on the other, fulfilling the expectations and attending to the elementary interests of workers (and members).

The irony is that sacrifice on the part of the membership necessarily has to come at a time which would anyway be difficult. The générosité of the CFDT is then immediately under pressure. As one CFDT official remarked:

La valeur de solidarité dans un temps de crise est une valeur qui n'est plus au premier rang. (K)

FO, focussing entirely on basic conditions, has reaped dividends by its refusal to get involved in the search for new solutions to the problems of unemployment. The CGT, meanwhile, has made demands and 'proposals' but has lacked both credibility and the muscle which might give them some chance of being

implemented.

The Confederations have a massive task ahead of them in seeking to change the terms of the economic debate. While survey evidence (e.g. Alternatives Economiques, June 1984) suggests that the French are not wholly convinced by the liberal remedies advocated by the Right, the policies tried by the PS/PCF government and supported with more or less enthusiasm by the main Confederations were discredited by the turn of economic events in 1982-83.

The CGT continues to call for reflation, protectionism and nationalisation. In fact, current developments in the major Western economies, especially the USA (where protection is back on the political agenda and there is pressure for internationally-coordinated reflation) suggest that some form of counter-cyclical government measures are now back in vogue. However, such macroeconomic measures are, of themselves, unlikely to solve an unemployment problem which is structural.

More radical steps are needed at local level and these almost certainly involve flexibility in working and remuneration arrangements. The CFDT has grasped this but, despite the scattered successes reported in its own press, the problem remains of coming up with formulae which cannot be seized upon as capitulation to the employers. Given the present low level of mobilisation and the hostility of the CGT and FO, that is difficult.

And then there is always the intractable problem of the attitude of the employers, little inclined to trade-offs with the unions, especially when they have the upper hand, as at present.

#### An Ever More Divided Movement

One important reason for the employers' dominance is the continuing weakness and division of the labour movement<sup>(3)</sup>. The period of Socialist government saw no increase in the unions' collective capacity to mobilise: on the contrary, the gap between the CGT and CFDT widened over a series of issues - compensation for reduced working time, alterations to legal regulations at local level, Afghanistan, and so on.

It was difficult enough trying to mobilise each syndicat behind quantitative demands: when the demands are qualitative, structured plans or proposals, the points of disagreement invariably multiply.

The problem used to be described as one of surenchère - Confederations or syndicats putting ever higher figures on demands to 'outbid' rivals for the workers' approval. The ground has shifted somewhat over the last few years, four of the five main Confederations backing contractual policies and making more negotiable demands. However, divisions are all the deeper over the more complex issues and only in one of the case studies (Kodak) did two syndicats line up behind similar proposals: ironically, this involved the CGT and a CFDT syndicat which freely voiced its opposition to many of

its Confederation's recent stands. Even here there were undercurrents of suspicion about each other's actions. Elsewhere, as at Chapelle Darblay, open disagreement could spill over into violence.

At national level, the situation was no better. The Italian trade unions demonstrated in the 1970s how industrial muscle could be effectively used to alter the shape of economic development, by, for example, getting the state to sponsor investment in regions which might otherwise be neglected (Lange et al, 1982). The French Confederations were too divided and too weak to achieve anything on that scale.

The press was quick to point to the emergence of a new 'reformist bloc' during the flexibility talks and as the CFDT helped oust the CGT from control of some important CEs. However, these were no more than ad hoc alliances between the CFDT, CFTC, CGC and FO: divisions over doctrine remain wide and these are regularly translated into policy differences (over such fundamental concerns as pay, the code du travail and, of course, the separation of the roles of union and management). The CFDT, like the CGT, still claims to have a transformative vision of the union role (see the interview with Edmond Maire, Le Monde, 22nd May 1986) and its exploration of new avenues has occasionally irritated the reformists: a more pragmatic approach still leaves wide differences of opinion as to the nature of current problems and how to tackle them, let alone ultimate aims.

Within this divided movement, the CGT's decline is clear and, though it is still the best implanted of all the Confederations and retains a certain 'spoiling capacity', the days when its mots d'ordre exerted a wide influence over French workers are gone. This may already have been the case during the 1970s but it was disguised by the appeal that, together, the CGT and CFDT held during the productive if precarious periods of 'unity in action' (Dubois, 1984). Now, with the CFDT moving in a different, sometimes quite opposite, direction, the CGT seems marginalised on the union left.

#### The CGT-PCF Connection

Tactics which were largely determined by PCF politics during the late 1970s and into the period of Socialist government are partly responsible for this marginalisation (Ross, 1982), along with the archaic tones of its rejection of the Socialists' modernisation projects and economic rigour.

Some of its criticism of the government's about-turn had a certain validity within the terms of its own analysis, notably that the 'constraints' evoked by the government were the result of the previous government's policies on opening up the French economy, lack of investment and the priority given to exports, and were therefore reversible (CGT, 1984a: 44-53).

However, any action that might have been expected on the basis of this analysis was constrained by two factors: first, the PCF, which shared a similar

analysis, was in the government for three years until July 1984 and therefore obliged to respect certain rules concerning collective responsibility. Though some observers reckoned it might 'use' the CGT to show opposition to some government measures, the Confederation generally maintained a low profile until early 1984, especially as far as national action was concerned. Besides - and this is the second point - despite growing unease on the Left and in trade union circles, the CGT had little success in actually mobilising against the government when it did try.

Its efforts, especially during the run-up to the 1986 election, had the effect of stirring up discontent inside the Confederation because of the apparent party political content of the move (Le Monde, 27th February 1986; and 30th November 1985 for the opposition of Socialist cégétistes to the tone of the CGT's 42nd Conference).

The unusual stirrings within the CGT were fuelled by arguments between Communists in the Confederation's ruling bodies. These came to the surface during the PCF's Central Committee meeting in May 1985 when, amongst others, Louis Viannet, sometimes seen as the CGT number two, openly criticised Henri Krasucki for the failure to contest Socialist policies and lay the blame for the workers' problems on the Socialist Party in government.

Krasucki was obliged to point out the difficulties in mobilising and the non-aligned status of the CGT (Le

Monde, 23rd and 24th May 1985; Le Matin, 23rd May 1985).

The latter point was emphasised in the initial document d'orientation prepared for the 42nd Conference and while some commentators readily interpreted it as the CGT fending off in advance any criticism of a pre-electoral onslaught on the Socialists (cf. Le Monde, 11th April 1985), Krasucki was evidently concerned to maintain a certain cohesion within the CGT. Its numerical decline would only be exacerbated if Socialists and others who preferred the Left government to the Right were further alienated.

Practically all the key CGT posts at Regional and Federation level are held by PCF members who are well-positioned to influence action and decision-making within the Confederation. However, it is simplistic to assume that the PCF-CGT link is consistent in its functioning and that the flow of demands is all one-way. Indeed, it may well have been the growing discontent within CGT ranks which persuaded the Party leadership not to participate in the Fabius government. Furthermore, the Party leadership has had to contend with growing unease over recent strategy and a small group of 'renovators' has attempted to open up internal debate. This echoed a similar debate within the CGT though that was stifled with the accession of Krasucki to the leadership and the squeezing out of 'proposition force' advocates such as Moynot (see, eg, Harmel 1982: 112-4).

The decline of the PCF as an electoral and political

force might in theory have allowed the CGT more space to develop a more independent, industrially-based line of action but in practice the Party has redoubled its efforts to push the union into an explicitly anti-Socialist direction, hence the statement at the CGT's April 1986 CCN to the effect that the Socialists had prepared the ground for the economic policies of the Right (Le Monde, 26th April 1986).

In the near term, given the hostile political climate, the current PCF isolationism and the continuing pressures on industry to reduce costs through lay-offs, it is hard to see the CGT adopting anything but a negative stance even if it continues to make 'proposals' in some form.

However, these proposals can only succeed, when they succeed at all, almost in spite of themselves. Given current notions of profits, 'sound management' and labour usage, CGT proposals would invariably push up costs on the negative side of a balance sheet and therefore do not even begin to address the problems as seen from the employer's viewpoint.

This is not to argue that the CGT cannot justify concentrating on alternative priorities - the regional effects of job loss, the waste of human lives through idleness, the way workers bear the brunt of any company failure but rarely enjoy the full fruits of success: simply, CGT demands, flying as they do in the face of current business logic, are unrealisable and the manner in which it seeks to achieve them under the current



system, positive in appearance, conceals an ideological and mobilising intent as much as any immediate hope of influencing management. The démarche has changed but not the underlying hostility to the capitalist system which brooks no compromise<sup>(4)</sup>.

In this light, even its exhortations to its activists to fully utilise the new rights contained in the Auroux legislation look like an attempt to push the system beyond its limits "in order to force confrontation. Ultimately, the CGT falls down through its lack of any 'intermediate strategy', its failure to demonstrate to workers that action can both satisfy immediate demands and further long-term ambitions.

So the CGT shares little common ground with any of the other Confederations at present and is likely to pursue its aims by attempting to mobilise at national level: in 1985-7 it attempted this increasingly, over the introduction of new regulations on work time and 'flexibility', trade union rights and so on. This is something of a return to the pattern which prevailed until the late 1970s: the big difference now is that the CGT, isolated, no longer seems to have the troops to make it count.

The divisions in the labour movement figure as a major factor behind the unions' failure to influence employment policy in the 1980s. A period of relative rapprochement on the political Left was not the signal for trade union unification that it was at the time of

the Popular Front: indeed, the industrial relations reforms of the Socialists did nothing to encourage this, the institutionalisation of union 'pluralism' being explicitly encouraged. Auroux made this clear when deciding not to make agreements dependent on being signed by majority unions:

... le pluralisme syndical est une réalité de la société française à laquelle nous tenons.

(National Assembly speech cited in Liaisons Sociales, 1984: 165). (L)

Even with the arrival in top positions of activists who did not live through the events leading to the post-war schism, FO and the CGT seem unreconcilable. The key, of course, is the PCF influence on CGT activity which is likely to remain important.

The CGT and CFDT are poles apart and the latter no longer sees the former as a privileged partner. The CGT prefers to make advances to CFDT militants and syndicats rather than the Confederation and in recent months has made similar overtures to FO activists when, interestingly, the cleavage between the two union 'families' - the CGT and FO on the one side and the CFDT and CFTC on the other - has reappeared, notably over the sanctity of acquis<sup>9</sup> (Raybould, 1985b).

The CFTC and CGC generally sit on the periphery of the triangular struggle, each with its distinctive identity.

Even the idea of one democratic Left union to stand up to the CGT which inspired CFTC/CFDT activists to seek a rapprochement with FO in the 1960s (Hanon and Rotman, 1982: 139; Descamps, 1971) is no longer on the agenda. And FEN, which often played the role of 'middleman' in the past in order to mount unified demonstrations, now seems to want to set up in competition to the Confederations, having suffered attacks on its constituency from FO and then the CGT.

A vicious circle emerges: the unions are losing members because they are unable to halt factory closures or change government policies because of their divisions; with their membership in decline, the fight for recruits gets tougher and divisions widen... None of the Confederations seems to be having much success in attracting 'new' workers (those in service industries, on contracts, temps, and so on) though the CGT recruited large numbers of immigrants in the car industry in the aftermath of the Left's 1981 victory.

A large part of the problem lies in the unions' inability to replace declining emotional attachments to the syndicat by other 'incentives' to membership, to use the vocabulary of Lange et al (1982). French unions have relied in the past on 'identity incentives' (political, often, based on principles and rights) and these are still the guiding light of many militants. Such incentives are no longer sufficient, and the young in particular have turned increasingly to single issue campaigns outside the workplace as more relevant to

society's problems and more personally satisfying. The CFDT has resolved to attract members by offering various services (insurance, leisure facilities, etc) but this is another issue which makes waves within an organisation which attracted members in the past on the basis of its political programme and democracy.

For some, an interest in providing services to the work group and concentrating on its immediate interests sails too close to corporatisme<sup>6</sup>, a pejorative term in the French labour tradition in which class action has been the beacon.

Negotiations in the work place have not taken off and so have not proved to be the rallying point for new members that some of the Confederations expected. Another vicious circle is therefore unbroken: the syndicat is too weak to impose itself as interlocuteur; the worker sees no advantage in joining so the union remains weak...

#### The Patronat and Trade Union 'Propositions'

The attitude of employers and managers towards trade unions in general has been an important factor in the development of the latter: Gallie (1983) argues that the radical nature of the French labour movement is due in large part to the policies of repression and exclusion adopted by the political and industrial élites, especially in the aftermath of World War One. That repressive tradition lingers on (see Ch. 3) though a more subtle form of 'human relations' manipulation and

direct employer-employee communication is the current mode (see Morville, 1985).

The patronat has rejected the ethos which guided the Auroux report, the idea that the unions should be strengthened and induced to bargain in good faith with a more open management. According to the activists in the case studies, information has been handed over grudgingly or not at all and decisions relating to employment and other matters in which Auroux envisaged a role for union proposals are still being taken unilaterally.

This kind of attitude did not surprise the activists I met: for the CGT members in particular, the patronat was only acting in its class interests in refusing proposals designed to benefit the workers and the community.

The same went for bargaining in general:

Avec les négociations obligatoires sur les salaires, on y va, on n'obtient pas. On n'obtient rien si on n'a pas de rapports de force. Ça, c'est la réalité de la lutte de classe. Il n'y a rien à ajouter. (CGT, Kodak) (M)

The CFDT's disappointment must have been more bitter. It had held secret meetings with the CNPF at the time of its recentrage in order to seek out areas where the 'social partners' might fruitfully engage in negotiations, yet subsequent evidence seems to show a

decline in negotiation at national level (Mouriaux, 1984b). Activity at branch level stagnated after the initial impetus provided by Auroux and negotiations in firms have in the majority of cases had little tangible effect (Le Monde, 28th June 1985).

The employers scrambled to hold talks on reduced working time in July 1981 in an attempt to pre-empt legislative change but they have subsequently refused to concede any further generalised reduction. The flexibility Protocol of December 1984 was seen by many activists as little more than a charter for deregulation, an employer diktat, and was therefore rejected; in the May 1985 talks on training and employment opportunities for those made redundant (contrats formation reclassement), the employers appeared to be going through the motions of negotiating, their minds fixed on the post-election political agenda.

Still, in their analysis of local initiatives, CFDT officials would go no further than criticising some unreceptive employers; and when verifiable economic factors convinced them that job losses were unavoidable, they were prepared to negotiate a 'social plan' as long as redeployment and retraining formed an important part. The CGT would only accept such a retreat after a defeat in action and, as at Renault, would not even draw the line at scuppering a highly advantageous redeployment plan if it felt that proper consideration had not been given to industrial alternatives.

Overall, the evidence from the case studies and

press reports shows that the unions failed to influence the industrial choices of the employers and government except in those rare cases where mobilisation and traditional displays of industrial muscle forced a rethink.

It is fairly obvious - but nonetheless important to underline - that jobs and employment are central in any union proposals. Employers may not enjoy having to lay people off, or being unable to take on new workers, yet the fact remains that their priorities lie elsewhere. The need to rein in costs, either because of competition or declining markets, invariably focusses on labour which has to be directly cut or otherwise made more productive. Against this, the unions are seeking to improve or defend conditions, beginning with the very fact of employment.

The nationalisations of 1981-82 may have muddled the notion of 'property rights': for all that, no right to work exists under capitalism or in the mixed economy, 'democratic socialism' of Mitterrand. As a result, under the present system, any notion of planning for jobs, and by extension any 'counter-plan' which has jobs at its centre, is utopian (cf. Casassus, 1979 and 1980).

Despite PS policy prior to 1981 (and despite CGT pressure), the Auroux laws gave no right of veto to CEs in any crucial areas, including redundancies.

In the end, the terms of the economic debate were left largely unchanged after five years of Socialist government and an intensive union attempt to see social

considerations given more prominence in industrial decisions-making.

### The Treatment of Redundancies

One major qualification of the above statement concerns the treatment of redundancies. Already, as a result of a 1969 agreement, any employer wishing to make workers redundant had to satisfy the labour inspector that no other solution was possible and draw up a 'social plan' with a view to aiding those no longer needed. In practice, a refusal from the labour authorities was hardly ever forthcoming but, especially if there was a union presence in a company, some form of assistance going beyond statutory redundancy pay was made by the employer.

This procedure has hardened during the 1980s and, often with a government subsidy, various measures are taken to help the redundant workers find alternative employment. This was the case in three of the companies studied.

This is undeniably an advance but it has to be set in perspective. First, this elimination of the licenciement sec, or outright redundancy, is only a feature of the larger, better organised firms: workers in the mass of small and medium sized businesses which are not unionised get their statutory rights at best. The CFDT in particular is acutely aware of this and has sought to remedy the situation by getting recognition for inter-enterprise delegates or even joint



union-employer bodies (in return for higher thresholds for representatives in smaller workplaces) in a given area.

Secondly, the union role here is usually restricted to social (or personnel) matters: nothing much has changed, then, since 1977-8 when the CGT and CFDT first began seriously to address industrial problems during the steel crisis but ended up with nothing more than an elaborate redundancy scheme. Despite the effort put into research and lobbying on industrial strategy, the unions have had little impact, either in the nationalised companies or the private sector.

Finally, even the improvements in 'social plans' have come about generally as a result of union muscle - riots in Lorraine over the steel cut-backs, pitched battles at Poissy over the Talbot redundancies, the occupation at Chapelle Darblay.

It is tempting to conclude from this third point that no new area of consensus has opened up in French industrial relations despite the structural reforms of the Socialists and the initiatives of the CFDT.

However, one development, already mentioned in the Renault study, suggests that the terms of the relationship may be changing: fonds salariaux, though still not widespread, seem to epitomise the type of approach sought by the CFDT as a way out of the present crisis - negotiations close to the workers, joint union and management decisions on the uses to which the funds are put, solidarity for those out of work as workers

cede part of their salary as a short-term loan to finance job-creating investments.

It is too soon to say if these schemes will spread or be extended but those that exist have been welcomed by the CGC and CFTC, as well as the CFDT, with FO reserved and only the CGT completely hostile. As with other developments, much depends on how far the employers are prepared to open up decision-making to the unions and the chances of that happening still seem slight.

#### Differentiated Levels of Union Intervention

The 'fonds salariaux' schemes are one example of the development during this period of different levels of union intervention, both within and beyond the workplace and, alongside this, new forms of worker representation.

Some of the latter are directly sponsored by the employers: quality circles, of course, which have blossomed despite the parallel establishment of groupes d'expression, often barely distinguishable in practice; and the more individualised forms of representation advocated by various employer pressure groups (Le Monde, 3rd May 1985) which do not seem widespread, as yet.

Other new institutions were set up by Auroux, as detailed in Chapter 4 - comités de groupe, economic and technological committees within the CE and worker representatives on the boards of nationalised companies. The latter still seem to be searching for a role but the other bodies were valuable as sources of information.

The délégués de site introduced by Auroux do not appear to have taken off though there has been no thorough research in this field.

Overall, the Confederations were keen that their activists seize the opportunities opened up by the new laws for gathering information and putting the union point of view but militants were often sceptical about their real impact and aware of the drawbacks: one CFDT activist described the legislation as 'lourde et inefficace' and, while recognising the need for new union initiatives in the field of industrial strategy, bemoaned the generally futile hours spent trying to persuade civil servants to intervene or at least consider union proposals.

An impression gained from fieldwork was that activists were burdened down with work - a not uncommon position for rank and file union activists in any country but exacerbated here by the demands made of the militant by the new emphasis on knowing the enterprise and industry, and by the multiplicity of institutional roles to be filled by a restricted number of people. CGT and CFDT officials acknowledged the problem, adding that the capacity to utilise the new laws fully would only come with experience and training, a necessarily slow learning process.

Although the CFDT in particular set out as one part of its unionisation strategy to involve ordinary members more closely in the work of the syndicat alongside the committed militants, the Auroux laws could conceivably

have the opposite effect: union 'specialists' could develop at syndicat level in the fields of economic policy, equal opportunities or legislation, for example. The practice of 'pooling' delegates' paid hours off so that one or two people could devote themselves full time to union business (which appears to be common in the CGT in particular) can, of course, exaggerate any divide between the super-délégués and the rest.

#### Growing Union Intervention Outside the Firm

Another interesting development over the last few years is the increase in positive union intervention beyond the work place and the development of structures to this end. French Confederations have always had a dual structure built on industrial branch and geographical lines, and, typically, the local, departmental and regional bodies occupy themselves with coordination, the development of syndicats and representing the Confederation in local bodies (Mouriaux, 1982: 19).

The recent period has seen these bodies initiating action as the run-down of traditional industry has depressed specific areas and towns - the best example in the case studies was the sponsoring of the 'Industrial Mission' by the CFDT in Rouen.

The CFDT was enthusiastic over the revival of comités locaux d'emploi (CLEs) (an early and, as it turned out, isolated success of the flexibility talks) and their tripartite membership (unions, employers,

local authorities). The committees were set up to study the local economy, suggest courses of action likely to save or create jobs and aid certain ventures of an exemplary nature (CFDT Aujourd'hui, No.60, March 1983; CFDT Magazine, No.92, March 1985). The CGT alone refused to sign the agreement on the CLEs, noting they had not done much for employment in the past and calling for them to have a veto over redundancies (Le Monde, 4th July 1984).

However, as the unions have, by themselves, been singularly unsuccessful in influencing employers' decisions, the alliances made possible by such territorial action could pay dividends - on both the indicators mentioned above, unionisation and power to influence events.

Tozzi (1982) suggests that the modern 'single issue' movements (he concentrates on the ecologists, feminists and regionalists) could help regenerate trade unionism as long as the Confederations resisted the temptation to integrate and ultimately smother them. Leaving aside the need for feminists to tackle the inbred sexism of trade unions, an obvious point of contact between the 'old' and 'new' social movements would be over the desire to save jobs on the one side and the parallel concern for local communities on the other: certainly, with the devolved powers of regional assemblies and the tripartite CLE's, there would seem to be scope for common cause between unionists and regionalists.

A different venture worth noting was the effort made

by the CFDT Union Régionale of Lower Normandy to organise temporary workers in Caen into a collectif d'intérimaires, an attempt which foundered on the lack of enthusiasm of the industrial syndicats in the town for any tripartite (UR, Fédération, collectif) organism and the lack of Confederation support (Baudouin and Collin, 1983).

All the Confederations were stung into paying more attention to their unemployed workers' unions in the face of an autonomous grouping which had some success in the first half of 1985.

The CFDT was the most active in searching for new structures outside the workplace both to respond to the problems of unemployment (as in its initiative on a regional, tripartite fund to channel savings into industry in Aquitaine, for example) and in order to represent those in employment more efficiently. During the flexibility talks, it suggested délégués inter-entreprises as a way of increasing union influence in small businesses, suggesting as a quid pro quo a raising of thresholds for other workplace bodies in those areas where local representatives were accepted (Le Monde, 9th-10th September 1984).

All this was part of the CFDT's 'new solidarities' strategy and fits in with its broad view of the crisis as being social as much as economic in its implications. It is therefore concerned to advance proposals beyond the usual confines of trade union activity yet without passing in the first instance through political

channels.

It is less rigid than the CGT in its appraisal of how industry has to evolve to remain competitive (within a market economy) and because of this places the emphasis on local schemes to replace jobs which are redundant: the CGT invariably refuses to accept the disappearance of any post though the CGT militants in the case studies often used local considerations in their arguments. FO chooses to remain within the workplace, to negotiate on social measures as a rule.

Given the geographical structures of all the French Confederations and the fact that industrial decline has an exaggerated effect on some regions and towns, this trend towards local union action outside the workplace must be significant. However, once again, divisions and differences of approach at this level are even more of a drawback than with traditional forms of action inside a single firm where at least there is a community of interests among those employed. Furthermore, as one CFDT official remarked to me in 1986, the arrival of a new government whose culture is not at all compatible with this sort of decentralised initiative or tripartite structure may signal a drying up of funds and a withdrawal of employer interest even in those areas where advances have been made.

Nonetheless, as matters stand, the 'territorialisation' of union initiatives confirms the tendency indicated by the interest in management

matters: union action on jobs is no longer restricted to defensive struggles and appeals to the state for subsidies.

The various forms of initiative from investment funds to 'alternative plans' represent a qualitative change in union action since the early 1970s, consolidated under the period of Left government, and in broad terms indicate a move away from the strict defense of employment towards the creation or transformation of jobs.

It is the CFDT which is most implicated here and the extent to which the trend continues depends on the political choices made by the other leading Confederations, FO and the CGT, and whether they are prepared to compromise their doctrine to improve their prospects of influencing employment - the CGT by being prepared to act within capitalism, FO by acknowledging that defense frequently requires a positive contribution in areas hitherto considered off-limits for the union.

### The International Context

The 'localisation' of union activity clearly reflects the diversity of conditions which are affected by regional and sectoral factors. Yet, since the early 1970s, there has been a massive internationalisation of capital flows and with it a tendency for transnational operators to increasingly shift productive capacity from one country to another, in search of more promising markets, more pliant labour, tax concessions and so on.



In each of the case studies and in the Confederations' economic programmes, the international context of union action raised certain ambiguities. Here again, the CGT stood alone in seeing the viability of national solutions to macroeconomic problems and refusing what it considered international solutions imposed on French enterprises by foreign groups or international agencies.

The other Confederations, while concerned that France should not abandon all independence and voicing concern for national interests, nonetheless subscribed to the view that a durable solution to the crisis necessarily involved coordination at the European level, on industrial, social, financial and political issues.

At the local level, in the heat of the battle to save jobs, matters could look a little different. European rationalisation (of steel, coal, paper) or the approach of a foreign group was usually perceived as a threat and there was a natural reluctance on the part of workers who had enjoyed well-paid jobs in what had been seen as core industrial concerns to accept they had to move on - which could involve both occupational and domestic upheaval - in the interests of some scheme worked out a long way away by people whose livelihoods would be little affected by it.

The activists had generally looked to workers abroad for information and, on occasion, with a view to formulating common lines of action, though these rarely came to much. Thus, the prospects for success at local

level were more important for the majority of the militants than any hopes they placed on international action: even those activists who had worked hard to forge international links were not expecting an equal return for their efforts in the fight for jobs:

Les réunions qu'il y a avec les Anglais, c'est bien, parce que ça permet d'avoir des informations, mais pour faire reculer la Direction, seule la mobilisation du personnel peut compter, il faut être réaliste. (CFDT, Kodak). (N)

Existing international structures were largely an abstraction for these rank and file activists and sometimes even a hindrance, as at Kodak, where FO was reluctant to join the Standing Conference because a similar body already existed within the international chemical workers' union, ICEF - which refused to work with the CGT. Similarly, the CGT was excluded from the international grouping of SKF unions because this latter body was attached to the ICFTU (FO and the CFDT were both members).

Although the Confederations asserted their solidarity with workers in struggle elsewhere, common cause was less easy to maintain. The following worker was only more outspoken than his comrades:

C'est les travailleurs espagnols et

italiens qui bénéficient de la fermeture, il faut pas le nier... En appeler à la solidarité internationale, penser que c'est suffisant pour dire: 'Bon, on ne va pas produire les choses qu'on a produites à Ivry...' Ca serait trop bon, ça! (CGT, SKF). (D)

Given this reality, the CGT argued that its 'franco-français' line alone had the interests of French workers at heart. Activists countered accusations of 'economic chauvinism' by calling for 'complementary' arrangements to the benefit of workers in all countries rather than the anarchy of competition. As noted in Ch. 7, in effect, it was attempting to 'freeze' a given international division of labour to preserve jobs. Confederation officials stressed the need for co-operation, too, arguing that present arrangements benefited only the powerful transnational groups, not any particular set of workers.

The 'franco-français' approach also fitted in with a central tenet of CGT economic thinking, on the feasibility of a national road to economic recovery. Furthermore, along with selective protectionism, giving priority to supporting industry at home (whatever the price advantages of imported goods) served to emphasise criteria other than the financial ones and underline the point that the loss of jobs was not inevitable, but could be avoided through different policies.

### The Uncertain Outlook for Industrial Relations

The 1981-86 period saw a major remoulding of the legislation covering industrial relations, designed to encourage more employer-union contact and the spread of bargaining. Yet, as Duncan Gallie (1985) concludes, the Auroux laws have done little as yet to fundamentally alter the structure of French industrial relations.

One major reason for this, again, is the attitude of the patronat which was not at all inclined to enter into the spirit of the reforms.

More importantly, despite the increased means allowed the unions, little was done to change real structures of power within the workplace: indeed, the Socialists expressly stated that powers of decision were to remain solely with management.

But it is doubtful, as noted above, if any of the Confederations seriously wanted anything different, and the CGT always seemed unlikely to enter in good faith into any new contractual order. At least as far as the CGT is concerned, the new institutions are simply being used in the old battles, an eventuality suggested by Eyraud and Tchobanian (1984).

It is interesting that the new Right wing government in 1986 appeared in no hurry to dismantle the existing industrial relations structures, its 'deregulation' effort being put instead into making the procedures for redundancy easier for employers and reducing the legal restrictions on certain types of employment contracts.

Even the pre-election talk of ending union 'monopoly' - that is, the right of legally recognised unions alone to present candidates in the first round of workplace elections - has been dropped.

It would seem that, in general, the unions do not worry the employers or the government at the moment and there is nothing in the Auroux legislation to force employers to behave much differently from in the past: negotiations can be routine and end without agreement, information can be withheld for a variety of reasons. The one completely new institution, the groupe d'expression, has restricted terms of reference even in the law and many groups have ended up as little more than quality circles, organised within existing company structures.

The attitude of the employers is summed up in the rebuff given to the CFDT's Jean-Paul Jacquier (ironically a prominent 'modernist') by an employer at a conference early in 1985:

Nous sommes en train de réussir sans les propositions de la CFDT. (Liaisons Sociales, R642, 6th February 1985). (P)

Industrial restructuring and the political and economic stakes referred to by D. Marsden (1985) in his more sanguine view of the Auroux reforms do not appear to have strengthened the unions' hand in any appreciable way, as the case studies show, and, as Gallie (1978) has

demonstrated, the lack of stability in French IR and management's refusal to concede any ground to the unions has not in the past harmed French competitiveness, at least in comparison with the UK and its 'consensual' system.

French employers have long held the unions at arm's length, conceding only what they have been forced to. However, in recent years, the technique has been refined by a concern to achieve a minimal form of employee consent. Thus, there has been a proliferation of quality circles and various informal workplace groups in which the worker is invited to contribute opinions on various aspects of a company's operations; many groupes d'expression seem to function in a similar way.

Some employer pressure groups have advocated a kind of workplace bargaining on pay and conditions with such informally-constituted groups. These talks would not comply with the legal obligation to negotiate as set out in the law introduced by Auroux but such decentralisation is near the top of the employers' agenda and both the CFDT and the CGC might accomodate a move in this direction. The upheaval of Auroux followed by the election of a government with radical, free market pretensions has clearly thrown up many fresh ideas and an unsettled period is likely in France before new trends harden.

#### The Effectiveness of 'Proposition Force Unionism'

Whatever happens, it seems that the unions have

failed in their efforts to put the issue of employment onto the negotiating table. As stressed above, employers have adamantly refused any concessions on this issue: employment decisions are a function of industrial policy and financial imperatives; at best, the unions are given a right to information and 'consultation', such as it is, does not imply any active part in the decision-making process.

At the time of writing, it seems that the CGT, partly for political reasons, is paying less attention to company plans and putting more emphasis on hard-line, defensive action and anti-government mobilisation. That, at least, would be consistent with the thesis offered here that the CGT's interest in union proposals was less a strategic than a tactical change brought about by political events since 1978.

The CFDT still has faith in 'counter-plans' and in the potential results to be had from serious negotiations: the CGC and CFTC, too, adopt what they see as a 'responsible', cooperative approach to industrial matters though their interventionist ambitions are less prominent than those of the CFDT simply because they are much smaller organisations.

So does 'proposition force unionism' stand up as a model for trade union action in the current French economic crisis?

Its achievements might be measured at two levels: the unions' influence on events and the attraction of this type of unionism for the workforce.

In terms of its success in saving jobs or even putting the unions in a position to influence employment in a positive way at local, branch or national level, 'proposition force unionism' has made little impact, for all the reasons set out here and in the previous two chapters.

So what of its success in bringing back workers to the unions? This is important because the density of French trade union membership, already low, has fallen sharply over the last decade and the changed tactics were designed not only to address the problem of employment in a more concrete way but also to attract a wider section of the workforce.

Immediately, 'proposition force' advocates are faced with a problem: in the difficult times of the 1980s, it is FO, the one Confederation which vociferously refuses any involvement in what it sees as management functions, which has fared best in terms of membership and in the national workforce 'elections'. On the face of it, this is something of a paradox: the nature of work and employment is evolving fast yet the most attractive Confederation appears to be the one that makes a virtue of its immutability, not to say immobilism.

It may be that the greater prominence of FO in recent years is in part a construct of the press and even more so of academic observers. Researchers and academics - in France as well as other countries - have concentrated overwhelmingly on the CGT and CFDT since the latter emerged in its 'deconfessionalised' form in



1964 and FO has been neglected, despite its important role in industrial and national negotiations and in the Social Security system.

Nonetheless, FO's gains in elections are real enough, as noted in Ch 1. The two most obvious reasons for this are its distance from the government (which meant that it was not tainted like the two avowedly Left unions when the government became unpopular) and its lack of pretensions in an increasingly complex political and economic environment: the emphasis on purchasing power is clear-cut and Bergeron's simple, repeated certainties are ultimately comforting.

In not claiming to have all the answers to unemployment and not seeing it as its role to find any, it left itself free to concentrate on negotiating redundancy terms and preventing a collapse of the welfare system. When the 'solutions' of the CGT and CFDT failed to move the Government or employers, FO, by concentrating on the social plans which companies were prepared to discuss, could lay claim to realism, responsibility and, often, success.

The very continuity of its line ensured that its policies were more accessible than those of the CGT and particularly the CFDT. FO's approach hardly looked set for success at the start of the Socialist period in office: although the new government wanted to encourage employer-union negotiations, it was aiming at enterprise level talks and FO was not as well implanted there as the CGT and CFDT; furthermore, a government wages freeze

and strict CNFF guidelines during this period gave little scope to negotiators. However, the point is that FO did not have to alter its essential willingness to negotiate (in contrast with the former reluctance of the CGT and CFDT) and this supported its reputation for fighting equally hard for the workers whatever the government in power.

On its own terms, then, FO's unionism has been conspicuously successful. However, its very 'minimalism' means that as a long-term strategy for union action in a rapidly changing economic environment it is insufficient. FO is particularly strong in the civil service and hospitals - a relatively secure base to fall back upon. It does not appear to have made recruitment in small industries or among temps, contract workers, etc, its priority and more than the other Confederations, its policies and structures are geared towards those in work, in 'normal' jobs. The collective agreements which FO champions have so far failed to tackle the problem of short-term contracts and other 'precarious' work forms, or technology, for instance, and FO rigidly refuses any questioning of acquis, implicitly rejecting any dilution of benefits even when these may generate employment for others.

The CFDT's approach goes in the opposite direction but it has not been as successful in gaining - or holding onto - members as FO. This is partly due to its specific stands - on civil servants' national insurance contributions and its support for rigueur, for example -

but also due to its mode of functioning: policy debate within the CFDT sometimes reaches a level of abstraction which makes it difficult to relate to particular issues and competing 'currents' within the Confederation give the impression of turmoil on occasion. It is certainly a more difficult union to be active in, or even a member of, than the relatively solid FO or CGT.

This, of course, is disastrous for the CFDT's recentrage policy which was designed to anchor the union closer to the workers, to attract members by a serious effort to improve immediate conditions. A stronger union could then make further advances in a radical direction: autogestion thus became a moving process rather than a model of society.

Instead, workers have been confused or even angered by the Confederation's 'realism'. Part of the problem, ironically, was due to the uncomfortable proximity of the (unexpected) Mitterrand victory to the recentrage: this policy had been designed to move the union away from action in the party political arena because the Confederation leaders expected the Right to be in power for a long time; in the post-May 1981 context, the CFDT's 'new realism' began to look suspiciously like moderation to help a Left-wing government - which, in the French context, meant the union had a dangerous image problem<sup>7</sup>.

The CGT faced the same problem of being associated with the government but its growing militancy from the start of 1984 was seen as being dictated by the PCF and

it was reproached afresh for subordinating union action to political considerations. The espousal of 'new criteria of management' failed to catch the public imagination and its interventions in the field of employment have failed to arrest the decline in membership recorded in Ch. 1.

Overall, then, the French unions seem to have had very little concrete success in the crucial field of employment and, at the end of the period under discussion, the movement as a whole seemed even weaker than at the start.

Most disappointed of all must have been the CFDT: despite its openness towards the employers and the fact that many of its active supporters found themselves in top political posts under the Socialists, its only real influence seemed to be on the intellectual debates of the period. Whatever the input of sympathisers inside ministerial offices, the views of militants on the ground and of leading officials were largely disregarded, leading to frustration at all levels. Worse, the CFDT may even have lost its position as second largest Confederation to FO.

For all that, the CFDT approach to the problem of employment still seems the one most likely to have any impact. It has moved furthest in its willingness to see the post-war 'settlement' between labour and the employers redefined to take into account the changed environment of the 1980s and this leaves it best placed

of all the Confederations to tackle new issues. But it still has much to do if it is to reconcile the interests of those in work and those seeking it and inspire 'new forms of solidarity'.

Significantly, rank and file activists that were interviewed - from all the Confederations except FO - felt the need to make the effort of putting forward argued responses to management plans, even if they had few illusions about the likelihood of their success.

The majority of French activists now accept that they have to 'dirty their hands' and join battle with the employers on what used to be taboo ground: all they need now are the troops to back them up...

#### NOTES

1. SCDP: 'Société Co-opérative Ouvrière de Production' - a workers' co-operative.

2. See R. Samuel, New Socialist, April 1985, for similar criticism of the British mineworkers' stance on worker participation in management.

3. In mid-1986, further divisions seemed to be appearing: there were suggestions that FEN, startled by the success of FO in recruiting in the education sector, was considering widening its field of membership to include other branches of the state sector. Mergers with smaller, autonomous unions were mooted in the press and even some form of organic link with the PS, but to date little appears to have come of all this. (See Le Monde, 16th May and 1st July 1986; and L'Humanité, 21st June

1986).

4. Elsewhere, such demands have been termed 'transitional demands': proponents know they cannot be met but see them as a means of discrediting reformist policies and perhaps gaining converts to insurrectionary parties or causes. See, for example, the article by Patrick Seyd (New Socialist, 27, May 1985) on the auto-dissolution of Hard Left groups whose members then pursued their old policies inside the Labour Party.

5. Cf. the surprisingly neutral account of FO's November 1984 Conference in L'Humanité, 24th November 1984. Shortly after the flexibility talks, a CGT official confided to me, not grudgingly but as though this was something he was not accustomed to admitting: 'Ils sont de bons syndicalistes, quand même.' This was accompanied by remarks about the CFDT being unsound, 'never true revolutionaries'.

6. That is, the pursuit of local and sectoral gains which have no wider implications and little class content.

7. Contrast the public statements of leading British trade unionists in 1986-7 about the 'priority' of getting a Labour government elected which effectively meant determining policy with one eye on the opinion polls and generally keeping a low profile.

#### TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

(A) 'All we wanted to do here was find work... That's not co-management! If we'd wanted to run the

firm, we would have set up a co-operative right at the start.' (CGT, SKF).

(B) 'Our aim is to say: there are a number of products which have been abandoned and a number of others which could still be profitable in the short or medium term. The Americans took these away from us and we have to try and create new activities... It's simply with that objective in mind - nothing at all to do with co-management.' (CFDT, Kodak).

(C) 'For the CGT, discussion and negotiation only have any meaning and potential when conceived as a moment of action, of mobilisation.' (Louis Viannet, Le Monde, 26th April 1986).

(D) '... reconquer, in the most noble sense of the term, the making of demands as the fundamental raison d'être of the trade union.' (Ibid).

(E) 'You shoot at the pianist till he plays right, but you never take over from him.' (Adam et al, 1972: 77-8).

(F) '... the union has no vocation to manage.' (CGT official).

(G) 'The employer remains in charge of management decisions but not of the choice of the criteria which

inform them.' (ibid).

(H) 'We don't take decisions. We make proposals, we assist, if you like, with the knowledge that we have of the firm and its problems... The problems of individuals have a direct relationship with the problems of the firm. But we don't get involved on the level of policy in the sense that we don't take decisions. We've got no responsibility for decisions.' (CGT, Kodak).

(I) 'The most insecure position of the lot is being on the dole.' (CFDT official).

(J) 'It is not easy to talk about work sharing and giving priority to the low paid in a firm where the average salary is getting on for 13,000 francs a month...' (Syndicalisme Hebdo, 9th February 1984).

(K) 'Solidarity, at a time of recession, is not a value that people put first.' (CFDT official).

(L) '...union pluralism is a reality in French society and one we want to maintain.' (Auroux, cited in Liaisons Sociales, 1984: 165).

(M) 'With the obligatory wage negotiations, you go in, you get nowhere. You don't get anything if you don't have a position of strength. That's the reality of class war. That's all there is to it.' (CGT, Kodak).



(N) 'Those meetings with the English were good because they let us get hold of information; but to force management to retreat, only the mobilisation of the workforce counts, you've got to be realistic.' (CFDT, Kodak).

(O) 'It's the Spanish and Italian workers who benefit from the closure, you can't deny it... Calling for international solidarity, thinking it's enough to say: "OK, so the stuff that used to be made at Ivry won't be produced..." That would be too good to be true!' (CGT, SKF).

(P) 'We're succeeding quite well without the proposals of the CFDT.' (Liaisons Sociales, 6th February 1985).

## CONCLUSION

In Syndicalisme Hebdo of March 15th 1984, almost a century to the day after French workers were first allowed by law to combine in syndicats, CFDT leader Edmond Maire warned that trade unionism was at a crossroads. Maire was specifically referring to that form of unionism which looked beyond the simple improvement of conditions and sought universal emancipation, the best organised sections of the workforce using their strength to aid the weak.

For some commentators, the union movement has already lost its way or, at least, it has been overtaken as a social force by other more vital social groups<sup>(1)</sup>.

Touraine et al (1984; see also his contribution to Faire, 1979) argue that the crisis of trade unionism is due to a decline in class consciousness as social divisions based on class become blurred, the attraction of other socio-economic models fades and industrial culture makes way for 'post-industrialism'. For these authors, the economy is no longer at the heart of all struggle and economic actors are therefore no longer the heralds of social change. In their place one finds the burgeoning single issue movements and the most important contribution of the trade unionist towards change now lies in helping these fledgeling movements to consolidate and guiding them in their efforts to get problems tackled by social and political institutions.

If the thesis of declining working class consciousness is correct, it would be potentially more serious in France than most other Western countries since the majority Confederations there have traditionally recruited and retained their active members by ideological appeal as much as the prospect of financial or other gain.

There is clearly some empirical basis for Touraine's claims in the decline of the CGT (see Ch 1): its solidly class-based unionism is still a force amongst industrial workers, yet its attractiveness to the workforce as a whole has been in steady decline for 20 years.

However, the implication of this school of thought is that status, consumption and 'life-style' are the new motors of social change. Unions are seen as peripheral to these cultural questions, Touraine et al claim, because they have been incorporated into the industrial system: they are important political actors within the system and act merely to limit the harmful effects of its 'progress' rather than provide a focus of opposition as the environmentalists, the anti-nuclear activists, the feminists and the regionalists do.

This is a very gallic view of the original role of the trade unions, consistent, however, with the historical stance of the majority, 'revolutionary' wing of the French labour movement until the late 1970s. Yet, as the evidence in the main body of this thesis suggests, some - if not all - French unions have begun to rethink their strategies and practices in the

last decade, and precisely in order to bring the union movement back into closer contact with a workforce whose ambitions and interests have altered and diversified over the years.

Whatever the current accent placed on consumption and (life-)style, paid employment - or the lack of it - remains central to the life experience of most adults. In fact, this may be truer today than for a long time as women increasingly combine participation in the labour market with family commitments<sup>(2)</sup>.

Those in work (and, indeed, those without work) still need some collective body to defend their interests: trade unions can fill this role providing they listen to what their membership or electorate is saying and build policy around this, guiding and leading the membership without taking for granted the direction it wishes to go in.

Landier (1981), while cataloguing what he sees as the failings of the French unions, is more reserved about signalling their demise. However, as might be expected from an observer who is a regular at personnel management seminars, he does forecast the (necessary) end of the politicised unionism which has predominated in the past. His 1981 book is rather sceptical about the transformation of the CFDT, which is understandable as the CFDT's notoriously vague programme was prone to conflicting interpretations as rival factions sought to take over and mould recentrage after their own vision.

In subsequent essays (for example, in Intersocial,

No. 111, March 1985), Landier has highlighted the support of the CFDT for a new contractual relationship between employers and unions and correctly situated the Confederation in the 'reformist' camp.

Reflecting the new direction taken by employers' organisations, Landier sees the future of industrial relations in France as lying in negotiations at the workplace level (Intersocial, No. 112, April 1985) - and not necessarily with the unions: any elected body (the CE, DPs or an ad hoc grouping) is seen as sufficiently representative.

In the 1981 book, Landier argued that trade union action in France was invariably corporatiste, meaning, here, aimed at advancing sectoral interests: class rhetoric was merely camouflage. He predicted that the new labour laws to be introduced by the Socialists would only serve to strengthen these 'tendances au corporatisme à justification idéologique'.

Clearly, Landier and other observers from a management perspective would like to see collective representation reduced to the level of staff associations or company unions. But this is the narrowest form of 'corporatisme', and a particularly anodyne form, designed to pose the least problems for employers.

Even if Landier's analysis of the factors behind the decline of French unionism are broadly accurate, his prognosis could only have any validity if industrial relations are looked at in a totally ahistorical

context. While it may be true (as many in the CFDT and CGT would concede) that 'revolutionary' unionism lost much goodwill through the neglect of the day to day concerns of the workforce, the long term transformative vision of these Confederations would still have great appeal if operationable alongside the addressing of more immediate issues.

Despite the changes outlined in this thesis, this vision still sets French unionism apart from movements in other Western countries where lip service, at most, is paid to notions of social change. Furthermore, in France, this ideological perspective informs the doctrine and activity of activists at all levels. One union activist among the white collar staff at Renault informed me:

Si je suis militant CGC, c'est pour véhiculer une certaine conception de l'entreprise et de l'encadrement. Tout comme à la CGT on véhicule une certaine conception de la société. (A)

This CGC member was trying to distinguish his union from the CGT by contrasting the latter's socio-political aims with the CGC's own preoccupations, more rooted in the workplace.

Yet the notion implicit in this vision is also political in a sense - the idea of management and workers pulling together for the good of all,

transcending inevitable divergences of interest through discussion and negotiation.

The point is that such theorising informs the activity of French activists of all persuasions much more than it does that of, say, British shop stewards. In the past, this doctrinal approach was one barrier to change among union activists. This has been gradually broken down - the CGC notion outlined above would probably be shared by some elements in the CFDT - but both the CFDT and CGT still share a concern to see a renovated social order. The 'new realism' of the former may have pushed this aspect of its unionism into the background yet the CFDT still claims a political voice for itself - indeed, it has strengthened its political voice by refusing to fall in behind the pronouncements of the parties of the Left.

It is hard in the 1980s to continue portraying the French labour movement as 'revolutionary', especially when what is probably now the second largest Confederation, FO, makes it a point of principle to stay outside the party political debate and concentrates on the narrowest of issues relating to working conditions.

Nonetheless, that does not mean that French labour has moved towards any norm that might have been envisaged by the 'convergence' theorists and liberal pluralists. A century of experience is not easily unlearned. This is one of the difficulties that union leaders have had to grapple with in the period under review: the compromise which is still emerging will have

to take into account the 'ideological baggage' a French militant carries around with him (or her) and which still sets him apart.

Thus, the unions' main problem in the 1980s is how to update their programmes to take account of the economic transformations underway, new employer policies and the scourge of mass unemployment, without alienating the active membership which may well cling onto the old ideals, the 'identity incentives' (to use the vocabulary of Lange et al, 1982: 221) which bound the militants to their Confederation.

The ideological difficulties inherent in any change of approach are magnified in France by the existence of five competing Confederations and a multitude of autonomous syndicats and Federations. As outlined above, in times of economic growth, this competition was invariably translated into surenchère: in the straitened times of the 1980s, it often means denouncing as betrayal any hint of compromise over the question of redundancies.

For employment is the central concern of the labour movement at the current time and is likely to remain so in the foreseeable future. Thus, as Erbès-Seguin (1984) has noted, a redefinition of the négociable is now required. No longer can wage rises be used as a surrogate for all other demands - that would simply buttress the comfortable position of workers in 'core' industries and banish larger and larger groups to the insecure periphery. One of the strengths of French



unionism has been its class basis, its presumption to speak for all workers, whether members or not: that virtue now has to be redirected towards a solution to the problem of employment, one which does not attempt to stifle all change but which nonetheless may have to accept a redefinition of the conditions of employment (in its largest sense) in the interests of the greatest number - including those out of work that the Confederations have belatedly begun to organise.

Amadiou and Mercier (1986) argue that this transformation of the négociable, coinciding as it has with doctrinal change within the CFDT in particular, has been opposed by some activists who still think in terms of distributing a surplus rather than keeping a company afloat. The evidence of my own research suggests that union leaders and many activists have made the necessary change in approach and objectives but have failed to marry the new concerns with the historical and ideological bases of their unionism. This has contributed to the confusion of workers and ordinary members and perhaps even played a part in a certain retreat from collectivist solutions (Cf. Kourchid, 1977a, 1977b and 1983).

A further problem - a major one - has been the negative response of the patronat to union demands for a wider role in industrial planning, and its attempt to bypass the unions even in their more traditional fields of activity.

French employers have long been more hostile to

organised labour than their counterparts in many comparable countries. In the 1980s, riding a free market, ideological wave which has covered much of the developed world, they have added a certain discipline to their approach, preparing a coherent programme to counter the social and economic arguments of both the political and the union left. In the process, those 'progressive' employers sought out by the CFDT in the late 1970s have been silenced.

Crucially, the patronat has tended to win the economic arguments without conceding any ground to the unions over new criteria for industrial planning. A no doubt genuine concern over redundancies led to some enhancement of earlier agreements to help those whose jobs disappeared but the underlying purpose of recent employer initiatives has been to weaken job security and leave individuals more and more to the whims of the market, undermining collective guarantees on the way.

As the problems of employment thrown up by recession, technology and the new world economic order mount, it is vital for the unions to confront them in a positive manner. If they simply dismiss the employers' arguments on flexibility, for instance, they run the risk not only of leaving the workers open to abuses they are too weak to fight but also of aiding the process of their own marginalisation, highlighting their own irrelevance as the employers would have it.

Some of the Confederations have conceded the need for a partial loosening of the tight legislative

framework governing industrial life in France but it is clear they cannot go too far down this path without alienating their membership, especially as the benefits to the workers of such a transformation are as yet unproven.

The CFDT in particular has invested heavily in establishing a 'realistic' image yet this strategy looks flawed.

One aspect of its new 'responsibility' was the downgrading of strike activity which, whatever the intention, underpinned the demobilisation of the workforce that followed the political disappointments of the late 1970s. Instead of national strikes and blanket responses to economic problems, the CFDT resolved to seek solutions closer to the point of production, organising the workers to study a situation and present employers with reasoned proposals which would form the basis for negotiations between two parties with admittedly different priorities.

However, as we have seen, the response from managers was generally negative and no real areas of consensus were allowed to emerge despite the concessions of the CFDT.

Perhaps there were too many discordant notes struck on the union side but the good faith of the employers also has to be questioned. Negotiations still seemed to be viewed by them according to short-run calculations of the rappports de force, as was clearly revealed by their approach to the two major sets of national negotiations

which came at either end of the period under study. In the working hours negotiations concluded in July 1981, the employers were desperate to reach agreement to pre-empt a legislative move that they feared would introduce a more drastic cut; but in the 'retraining and redeployment' talks of May 1985, it soon became clear that the CNPF had no interest in coming to any agreement since it expected an imminent change of government to produce many of the alterations it desired without the need for concessions on its own side.

Despite the Auroux laws, the patronat, by most accounts, was still little inclined to negotiate on change in the workplace and an apparent trend towards decentralised negotiations actually threatened the unions since the employers' aim appeared to be to circumvent them.

Against this background, the CFDT's emphasis on bargaining with management looked dangerous to many of its own activists. There were sound historical reasons for the militants' fears, as one commentator pointed out in the aftermath of the December 1984 'flexibility' talks:

Historiquement, disposant du pouvoir,  
(le patronat) disposait de l'initiative en  
matière sociale. Par son inflexibilité en la  
matière, profitant de toutes les occasions et  
ne cédant qu'à la force, il a nécessairement  
sécrété une défiance profonde à son égard et

justifié au bout du compte la source légale échappant à sa volonté directe et s'imposant à lui, comme source 'sécurisante' du droit du travail aux yeux des syndicats. (Roudil, 1985: 90). (B)

The continuing refusal of the employers to see the unions as industrial partners can only confirm the average activist's reliance on strong legal safeguards to provide minimum protection for the workforce.

The CFDT press has made much of those agreements its syndicats have reached with local employers on working time, shift patterns and related employment levels but research needs to be done to ascertain how extensive such agreements are. And it remains to be seen how long reprieves negotiated in return for concessions on flexible working hold up.

A more immediate question - and this was one factor in the rejection of the 'flexibility' protocol by CFDT activists - is whether any trade union should be involved in underwriting the kind of 'creeping précarisation' currently under way in France.

Thus far, most of the concessions seem to be coming from the employees, either in terms of a reduction in real pay (to offset a reduction in the working week even though output tends to remain constant), less secure contracts or even unemployment. The employers argue that such 'flexibility' is necessary to allow a company to respond quickly to changes in markets and that this will

eventually produce a strong economy which will be for the good of all. However, in the short term, the unions have few means of ensuring that those workers who make the sacrifices are actually given something approaching a 'fair deal', even within the constraints of a firm's financial health.

Managerial reluctance to cede the 'right to manage' was unsurprising. More unacceptable for the unionists I met was that even the Left government, once it had legislated for greater rights to information and opened up the possibility of intervention, seemed reluctant to back plans prepared by the unions with the workers' interests to the fore.

Some observers (Huiban and Landier in particular, in their various publications) place an exaggerated stress on what an 'enlightened' 'proposition force unionism' might achieve simply through action at local level and agreements with employers. The scale of the problems currently affecting employment suggest that a direct influence on national political policies is also vital.

Given the importance of the political context for French unionism historically, the ideal situation seemed to exist between 1981 and 1986 for the unions to influence policy in an unprecedented way.

A government was in power which, at least in the beginning, had radical pretensions and which had a mandate to reduce unemployment through a programme involving an expanded state sector and a commitment to a form of industrial democracy.

Activists from the two largest (in 1981) Confederations took up posts as advisers to Ministers and the union influence was clearly visible in the new labour legislation introduced by Jean Auroux.

Yet ultimately, just as they made little impression on the employers in spite of their new rights, so the unions failed to gain any lasting increase in power at the national level - witness their inability to influence government economic and industrial policy when priorities were altered from 1982-3. The major factor here - again - is the fragmentation of the movement, for the unions ended the 1981-6 period much as they entered it, dispersed and in disarray, leaving employers and government to play one off against another whenever necessary.

There was no realignment in the union movement to match that on the political left where Mitterrand's PS secured the dominant position. In fact, the splits in the labour movement have been institutionalised by the acceptance of 'pluralism' to which all the Confederations except the CGT subscribe.

Under this curious 'pluralism', militants tend to make ideological and political choices as to which Confederations they will be active in but subsequently have to water down - or at least attempt to disguise - any party political orientations in order not to alienate a wider audience still attached to the tradition of non-alignment. This effectively precludes the kind of organic party-union links common in northern

Europe. As Eisenhammer (1985) has noted, French socialists and left-wing unionists may talk dismissively of 'social democracy' yet the absence of close relations helps explain the disarray of the Left in power and the hesitancy of the unions in mobilising behind the government.

In a world where it is increasingly difficult to distinguish some 'pure' field of industrial matters from the wider economic and political arena, the historic mistrust of party political activity built into French union doctrine badly needs to be overhauled if the political and union wings of the labour movement are both to be fully effective.

However, the Leninist 'transmission belt' model is clearly inappropriate as it tends to subordinate the short and medium term interests of the workers to political considerations. The model once suggested by Edmond Maire - the union debating a programme with the Parties of the Left, pushing the interests of the workers but accepting that the responsibilities of government may entail a certain adaptation of priorities depending on circumstances - never had the backing of all in the CFDT and further experience of the Left in government from 1981-6 has again brought to the surface lingering 'workerist' myths as well as understandable reservations concerning the definition of political priorities. Yet this period has also surely shown the need for workers to be directly represented at the centre of political power, the need, therefore, for some



kind of formal party link.

Again, however, some minimum consensus as to goals and tactics is vital, yet for the immediate future the CGT (like the PCF) seems to have opted out of the debate. Its slide back into an uncomplicated oppositionalism seems destined to further loosen its grip on the industrial working class and the 'spoiling capacity' that it retains is a poor replacement for the more thoughtful, positive approach which was struggling to emerge in the early 1980s.

In the past, the stimulus for change within the CGT (which meant practically the whole of the labour movement until the late 1940s) has more often than not been political in nature: this was particularly the case with the various schisms and reunifications and also includes the ending of the CGT-CFDT 'unity in action' pact.

Equally, the attitude of managers and employers has helped shape the behaviour and doctrine of the unions.

Gallie (1983) explains the more radical nature of French workers as a whole by the grievances, based in the workplace, which a left-wing political and union movement have been able to amplify and channel into an oppositional force.

These factors are still pertinent in the 1980s, yet the environment is now quite different in major respects and their impact on the workforce is therefore also markedly different.

The French patronat has pushed through its aggiornamento (Weber, 1986) and, moving from a reactionary to a 'progressive' stance, adopted new personnel policies (Morville, 1985) which aim to co-opt the workers, individually, into the enterprise culture rather than browbeat them into submission to managerial authority.

That trend goes a long way towards explaining the apparent lack of impact of the changes in collective institutions brought in by Auroux (the individual 'right of expression' of a worker on his working environment has been taken over by the employers and channeled into a 'quality circle' function).

On the party political front, the period under review has seen the decline of the PCF in local, national and European elections, its replacement as leading party of the Left by the PS and the subsequent transformation of the latter into a moderate, reformist social democratic party striving to come to terms with the restructuring of the capitalist economy and changing social formations<sup>(3)</sup>.

The implications for the unions are clear: they, too, must evolve and formulate new policies more in tune with the aspirations of the workforce but still push for reforms to counteract the worst effects of economic change.

The CFDT has grasped this but the CGT, while adapting its practices and modernising its analyses, has failed to shift sufficiently from an anti-capitalism

which both reduces its credibility for an increasingly large number of workers and lends too many of its proposals an 'impossibilist' air. It is unlikely to change as long as the PCF retains effective control of its major constitutional bodies and the Party appears to be clinging on to this control all the harder as its political base is eroded.

If Gallie's hypotheses are correct, then the combination of a 'softer', more subtle employer approach and the demise of the 'revolutionary' politics capable of moulding any discontent would seem to herald a more stable phase of industrial relations in France.

Yet the present calm may be deceptive. Discontent may appear residual in the current climate but it is more probably merely latent and frustrations can easily spill over into industrial action if the workers perceive the new employer attitudes to be superficial; and if the legitimate channels of communication are weakened further, those same frustrations are always capable in France of welling up into serious social disturbances. Furthermore, the still growing body of unemployed people and those in insecure employment form a sizeable bloc whose anger might just as easily find a destructive outlet.

If the CGT is unwilling or unable seriously to address these problems, the most interesting question then concerns the areas of agreement that the reformist Confederations - including now the CFDT - can find without either being reduced to 'lowest common

denominator' demands which do not seriously challenge the employers' reading of the crisis or, on the other hand, simply repeating traditional positions (for example, on the sanctity of acquis) which fail to address new and serious issues and leave the employers - and governments - free to impose their own solutions.

In assessing the prospects, it is hard to see much scope for agreement. To be sure, overall, there have been some unforeseen developments in France over the last decade. Even the fact of investigating a company's financial state, then seeking to influence its plans, was an important change of practice for those unions - the majority wing of the labour movement until recently - which had traditionally been opposed to any involvement with the capitalists.

What is more, the fact this 'proposition force' approach was adopted by a wide variety of workers was interesting.

Although French academics (such as Casassus, 1979) often refer to the Lucas workers' initiative as breaking new ground for trade unionists (and in terms of its proposals for alternative products it is still in advance of all the plans I came across) it was largely an isolated venture in Britain and 'counter-plans' have been scarce despite the massive job cuts of the 1980s. In contrast, France has witnessed a veritable movement, encompassing a wide variety of plans sponsored for the most part by the CGT and CFDT.

Yet, given its lack of success with employers, the biggest single effect of the French 'counter-plan

movement' may, ironically, have been to drive a further wedge between the main Confederations, which have differed in both the details of plans and in their strategic intent in putting them forward (or refusing to).

The CFDT has led the way in seeking to bargain over employment, accepting the introduction of 'non-standard' forms of contract, local alterations to employment law and the loss of some benefits if they are replaced by others which might enhance job prospects or help the modernisation effort of a company. The CGT and FO, meanwhile, have both refused to 'barter' acquis and have been vociferous in denouncing what they see as a betrayal of the workers by the CFDT.

Not that this has brought the CGT and FO any closer together: precisely, the latter sees the former's interest in management as an aspect of communist subversion, further proof that the CGT is not an independent trade union but the industrial arm of a political party.

Obviously, the decline in employment is of great concern to the French public and, a priori, one might have assumed that any positive attempts to arrest this decline would have helped the unions rebuild their influence and standing. This has not been the case, for two main reasons: first, the unions have been unable to impose their reading of the economy and, particularly with the reordering of the Left government's priorities from 1982-3, the arguments of the employers and the

Right have won the day. Secondly - and this contributed greatly to the first problem - there was no agreement on the union side on how to proceed, either in terms of aims or tactics. Even when the unions forced their plans (or demands) to the centre-stage, the public has been confronted by a cacophony of voices which makes it all the harder to revise 'common sense' views, especially when these are repeated by economic actors such as company chiefs deemed to be authorities in the matter. If FO has managed to come through the recent period relatively strengthened, it is because the grand public has proved more receptive to its policies: its spokesmen have restricted themselves to straightforward commentaries on the economic situation and its activists, for the most part, have negotiated redundancy packages which answer the problems identified by employers who have set the agenda in this as in other fields.

This, too, may be represented as 'responsible' trade unionism yet redundancy packages, whatever the terms for those displaced, no longer look like a sufficient response to the social and economic problems thrown up by the structural changes in the national and international economy and the rapid development of new technologies.

The political solutions adopted by practically all the developed countries seem to indicate a reformulation of the 'post-war settlements' which had full employment and comprehensive social security systems at their

centre. Increasingly, social provision is being cut back, essential community services are put back into the marketplace and the commitment to full employment has been qualified or implicitly abandoned.

Again, and this cannot be emphasised enough, the divisions in the French labour movement facilitate the employers' task. Despite the advances of the past decade charted in this thesis, the historic disintegration of organised French labour continues to weigh heavily on its present capacity for action and it is hard to see any change in this situation in even the medium term<sup>4</sup>.

There has been a certain realignment during the past decade and, as a result, it is no longer appropriate to talk of the French unions as 'revolutionary' in their majority. This has long been something of a misnomer: even the CGT works for socialist transformation through the ballot box and the CFDT - despite the gauchiste militancy of the post-1968 period - has always sought a democratic road to socialism.

But nowadays the CFDT seems to have all but abandoned socialism as a goal, although a certain respect for the sensitivity of the activists ensures that its leaders ritually refer to their 'vision of change' - quickly balancing that, however, with professions of pragmatism and realism (see, for example, the interview with Edmond Maire in Le Monde, May 22nd, 1986).

This has various implications for the likely evolution of French unionism. On the one hand, the CFDT

is now well equipped doctrinally (and technically, with its splendid new facilities and large staff in Belleville) to tackle the issues of most concern to the workforce. It is well positioned to advance workers' claims in areas such as economic and industrial policy where their interests have not been well represented in the past. Recentrage has broken down the ideological barriers to such an attempt to improve conditions within the capitalist system and, given the gravity of the current situation, the decision to 'dirty one's hands' rather than indulge in futile posturing was an essential first step.

On the other hand, the pragmatism advocated by some of the CFDT 'ultra-modernists' rests on unproven theses - notably that deregulation will help employment prospects and that bargaining can better serve the mass of workers than guarantees enshrined in laws. By offering concessions against rewards which are in the nature of things uncertain, the CFDT may be selling workers short, sanctioning the emergence of a multi-layered labour market far more unjust than the one it currently inveighs against, with the 'well protected' workers in the industrial core and the masses outside, in small firms and service industries. In particular, some CFDT leaders seem complacent about the quality of the new jobs on offer and rather too trusting of modern employers whose talk of worker participation and individualised job specifications may only be a cover for increased manipulation and exploitation.



The CGT is alive to these dangers but its negative, defensive attitude since the demise of the PS-PC alliance has tended to blunt the effectiveness of its genuine criticisms for all but the committed - and these are getting fewer and fewer as the former bastions in heavy industry close or retrench while the culture and myths which sustained a revolutionary working class movement fade. The refusal to re-examine acquis has reinforced the unbending image of the CGT, understandable given the way each advance has had to be wrenched from a hostile patronat but arguably no longer in the overall interests of the workers due to the modern company's need for suppleness.

FO's rigidity, born of a similar view of the sanctity of acquis and the Code du Travail, is tempered somewhat by its espousal of la politique contractuelle and its willingness to sign agreements, in part to distinguish itself from the CGT. Yet its recent advance seems to be the result of an opportunistic decision to highlight its apolitical image to attract those disaffected by the trials of the Left in government and the refusal to treat industrial policy as a proper target for union action leaves it voluntarily on the sidelines as far as the major problems of the labour force are concerned.

The CGC and CFTC, meanwhile, will retain their special constituencies but can only hope to have any impact on industrial matters in conjunction with the larger Confederations, in ad hoc alliances.

It was necessary for the French unions to attempt some change of direction at the turn of the decade, not only to tackle the growing problem of employment, but also, indeed, to guarantee their survival.

For, if they cannot influence events in the type of firm examined here, where they are at their strongest, their credibility as a social force is diminished.

The verdict must be that their efforts were not conspicuously successful, either in defending jobs or attracting members.

The 'proposition force' approach might be seen as a necessary but not a sufficient change: studies on aspects other than emploi are needed to complement this piece of research and highlight attempts at renewal in other spheres of union activity.

Now that the limits of the approach are clear, the unions must think again about how best to defend their members' immediate interests.

In 1988, as this conclusion is being written, internal debate is sharpened in all three major confederations by a leadership battle: Maire, Bergeron and Krasucki are all likely to stand down in the coming months.

It is not impossible that the more reasoned unionism struggling to emerge in the early 1980s could lose ground, and a more aggressive unionism of mobilisation could be on the agenda, not only in the CGT.

Most observers of the French labour scene agree on one point at least: 'the future of the workers' movement remains quite open'. (Kesselman and Groux, 1984: 322; see also Lange et al, 1982).

The industrial relations environment has altered dramatically during the last decade as a result of industrial, political and legislative change, but also due to the conscious strategic decisions of the unions themselves.

Even if it is not clear cut and still being held back by political considerations and worries about union 'purity', a feature of the period under review has been the unions' growing desire to influence the transformations under way now rather than merely oppose them in the name of some greater socio-political transformation to come.

Whether this influence ever amounts to much depends greatly on the alliances forged between the union movement's constituent parts, as well as with potential sympathisers outside, in the single issue movements, the regions but particularly in the political arena.

At the time of writing, although internal renovation has at least enabled the unions to begin addressing the real issues, their capacity to weigh on events in the future seems far from assured.

#### NOTES

- 1) The 'crisis of unionism' is not restricted to

France. Labour groups in other industrialised countries face similar problems to a greater or lesser degree. See the introduction to this thesis and the contributions to the ECWS conference on 'The Role of Trade Unions in the Coming Decade', Maastricht, November 20-22nd, 1985, especially the closing summary by Georges Spyropoulos. (Many of the papers are now published in Spyropoulos (ed.) 1987).

2) The female participation rate in France rose from 41.9 percent in 1975 to 45.4 percent in 1984 while the male rate fell to 66.8 from 71.2 percent during the same period. (Source: Annuaire Statistique de la France (1985). Paris: INSEE.

3) A similar restructuring of the Left and centre-left is taking place, naturally with local variations, right across the developed world in, for example, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Australia and the UK, to name only those countries where recent election results have confirmed the trend.

4) A stirring of revolt by railway workers and others in the public sector as 1987 began hardly signified a revival: the various Confederations were left trying to gain control of events as rank-and-file organisations made all the running while the issues which caused the strike were the traditional ones of pay and gradings (though a clumsy attempt by management to rewrite rotas also fuelled the dispute). (An account of the strike is given in Bridgford, 1987).

#### TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

(A) 'If I'm a CGC activist, it's in order to put over a certain conception of the firm and the people who run it. Just as, in the CGT, they put over a certain conception of society.' (CGC, Renault).

(B) 'Historically holding power, the employers also held the initiative in social matters. Through their inflexibility here, taking advantage of any opportunity and only giving in to force, they necessarily engendered a deep mistrust and justified, when all's said and done, the legal process slipping from their direct will and imposing itself on them as the process of labour law which was comforting in the eyes of the unions.' (Roudil, 1985: 90).

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# APPENDIX ONE

## COMITES D'ENTREPRISE RESULTS

(expressed as a percentage of votes cast)

	CGT	CFDT	CFTC	FO	CGC	OTHER UNIONS	NON- UNION
1966	50.8	19.1	2.4	8.0	4.2	3.5	12.0
1967	45.0	17.7	2.1	7.5	3.9	3.9	19.9
1968	47.9	19.3	2.9	7.7	5.1	5.4	11.7
1969	40.3	18.2	2.7	7.0	4.9	5.9	20.4
1970	46.0	19.6	2.7	7.3	5.5	7.0	11.9
1971	43.3	18.9	2.1	7.6	4.7	6.2	17.0
1972	44.1	18.9	2.6	7.6	5.6	7.1	14.1
1973	40.8	19.6	2.6	7.7	5.1	5.2	19.0
1974	42.7	18.6	2.6	8.3	5.3	6.2	15.7
1975	38.1	19.4	2.6	8.4	5.7	6.1	19.0
1976	41.5	19.1	2.7	9.3	5.3	7.0	14.6
1977	37.4	20.2	3.0	9.0	5.4	5.7	18.8
1978	38.5	20.4	2.7	10.0	6.6	5.2	16.3
1979	34.4	20.5	3.1	9.7	5.8	4.8	21.2
1980	36.5	21.3	2.9	11.0	6.0	5.0	16.8
1981	32.0	22.3	2.9	9.9	6.1	4.1	22.2
1982	32.3	22.8	2.9	11.7	7.0	4.4	18.4
1983	28.5	21.9	4.0	11.1	6.5	4.7	22.8

(Source: Ministère du Travail - published in Liaisons Sociales, Document L/128, 21st February 1985).



## APPENDIX TWO

### The Union Press

The CGT publishes a weekly magazine, Vie Ouvrière, and a fortnightly organ, Le Peuple, which carries formal statements, records of official meetings, etc.

Amongst its other publications is a quarterly review, Analyses et Documents Economiques.

The CFDT has a monthly magazine, CFDT Magazine, and a weekly paper for its members, CFDT Syndicalisme Hebdo. Every two months, it publishes a theoretical review, CFDT Aujourd'hui.

FO has a weekly paper, Force Ouvrière Hebdo, which includes a magazine supplement, approximately every month.

The CFTC publishes, monthly, CFTC Syndicalisme.

The main CGC organ is the monthly Cadres et Maîtrise.

Mention should also be made of Liaisons Sociales, an independent body which runs an information service for personnel officers, trade unionists, etc on all aspects of industrial relations, with the accent on labour law. It is based at 5, avenue de la République, 75011 PARIS.

Finally, Résister is a grassroots magazine and forum for debate aimed mainly at CGT and CFDT members.

### APPENDIX THREE: A NOTE ON FIELDWORK

The information contained in the studies and other new material was gathered mainly through interviews with activists in each company involved. The usual procedure, after making contact, was to interview the secretary of the workplace branches and return later to interview other activists, individually where possible, in groups if pressure of time meant this was the best way of obtaining a wide number of responses.

This latter course frequently had the interesting effect of highlighting differences of emphasis which might not have emerged from one-to-one discussions.

The interviews were guided by a schedule of 34 questions. The first six related to the personal history of each activist within his/her company and Confederation.

The specific case was raised by asking the activists what they considered were the real reasons for the problems in their company - the national/international crisis, company strategy, new technology, etc. I then sought to establish how far activists agreed with the 'counter-plan' approach and how their plans were drawn up. A key area probed in this section was the degree of involvement sought in management, and what tensions this may have thrown up.

Activists were then asked how they situated their action in the context of their Confederations' policies on industry and employment.

The final twelve questions tackled the wider issues relating to employment before moving on to more general but related areas - the 'flexibility' talks and the Auroux laws. (However, these were more often than not brought up earlier by the activists).

The last question asked directly about the nature of union activity under a Left government in France. It was introduced by reference to the U.K. labour movement model. Since much of the fieldwork was done during, or just after, the 1984-1985 miners' strike, the group interviews in particular often ended in illuminating discussions on the differences between industrial relations in the U.K. and in France.

The Kodak interviews were conducted in January and February 1985, with a total of 14 activists - six from the CGT/UGICT, five from the CFDT and three FO. (Group discussions, in all cases, obviously only involved activists from one Confederation only).

I visited the SKF works on three occasions while it was still under the control of CGT occupiers in April 1985. Only CGT members remained active: I interviewed two at length and held one group discussion.

I went to Rouen twice in March and May 1985, visiting the St Etienne Chapelle Darblay works on both occasions.

There, I interviewed two CGT activists individually and spent a day in informal discussion with others. I also interviewed three members of the CGC branch - one a

foreman, the other two junior white-collar staff.

It proved impossible to interview any of the CFDT activists for reasons apparently to do with internal local union politics. This disagreement between company activists and regional CFDT officials is raised in relevant section of the case studies chapter.

The CFDT secretary at Chapelle Darblay withdrew at the last minute from a planned meeting, informing me that I needed clearance from the Rouen office. I arranged a meeting with the relevant officer but he did not keep the appointment when I returned to Rouen. One of his colleagues gave me various documents concerning the dispute but claimed she did not have enough first-hand knowledge to answer the questions.

I visited the Renault Billancourt complex on several occasions between April and June 1985, interviewing senior members of the CGT, CFDT, CGC and FO branch and also holding a discussion with CFDT activists.

Interviews were held with officers from all five Confederations who had responsibility for economic and industrial matters, as well as participants in the flexibility negotiations from each organisation. I returned to Paris in June 1986 to clarify certain points with CFDT and CGT officials.

Both these Confederations allowed me free access to their documentation centre/library.

I attended the Confederal Conferences of FO (Vincennes, November 1984), the CFTC (Marseilles, November-December 1984) and the CFDT (Bordeaux, June 1985), and was able to discuss my work informally with delegates.

My attempt to get accreditation for the CGT Congress in Montreuil, November 1985, was unsuccessful, but I was able to pick up documentation on the spot.

I decided against meeting with management in the companies concerned since this might have jeopardised contacts with the unions, which was naturally my priority. However, I interviewed officials of the main employers' body, the CNPF, on their attitude towards the developments examined in this thesis.

The union press was kept under constant review, as was the national and specialist press, and an extensive cuttings collection built up.

I was able to consult studies and discuss work in progress at various research centres in France, notably at CRESST, CNAM, LEST AND CEVIPOF, but above all with the researchers of the Groupe De Sociologie Du Travail. I was given access to the library of IRES, the trade union resource and research centre set up with the backing of the Mauroy government and, unusually, all the main Confederations plus FEN.